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RECORD OF A BURMESE MISSION TO CHINA
U THAW KAUNG

THE GOLDEN ROCK AT KYAIK-HTI-YO
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THE ECOLOGY OF BURMAN-MON WARFARE
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TIGER ON THE SHWEDAGON!

REVIEWS

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Palm-leaf Manuscript Record of a Mission Sent by the Myanmar King to the Chinese Emperor in the Mid-Eighteenth Century

U Thaw Kaung¹

Introduction

On 16 September 1983, as Chief Librarian of the Universities Central Library (UCL) in Yangon, I acquired an extremely rare palm-leaf manuscript from a Middle School teacher from Pakkoku, U Tin Ngwe (U Tin Ngwe (1931-2004) later became Headmaster of a Middle School in Pakkoku). When U Tin Ngwe brought the manuscript to UCL, he told me that he had acquired it from a Buddhist monastery near Myaing, his birthplace about twenty-five miles northwest of Pakkoku. I first came to know of the existence of this manuscript about five years earlier, in November 1978, while I was in Pakkoku on one of many trips made to various parts of Myanmar in search of rare palm-leaf and paper *parabike* manuscripts. We used to go on manuscript search trips from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s and found many interesting and rare manuscripts that are now kept in UCL. The palm-leaf manuscript purchased from U Tin Ngwe is a record of a mission sent by the Myanmar king Maha-damā-ya-za-dī-patī (r. 1733-1752) to the Chinese Qianlong Emperor (r. 1736-1795) of the Qing Dynasty.

During the time I worked as a librarian, I used to inform scholars in various fields whenever rare manuscripts were acquired. I informed Dr. Than Tun about this manuscript and had a hand-written copy made for him soon after the manuscript had been cleaned and microfilmed. U Htun Yee, a close colleague of Than Tun and I made about one hundred mimeographed copies, half of which I bought from him for distribution to University and College Libraries in Myanmar and to send abroad on exchange to national libraries such as the British Library, the Japanese National Diet Library and the Library of Congress, and university libraries with special Southeast Asian collections like those at Cornell University, the University of Michigan, the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London), the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, and several others.

The Sino-Myanmar scholar who specialized, from the mid-1950s until his death in March 2005, in the historical relations between Myanmar and China was Chen Yi-sein (Chen Yi-sein (1924-2005) known in Myanmar as U Yi Sein was recruited by my father, Sithu U Kaung, the first Chairman of the Burma (later Myanmar) Historical Commission (M.H.C.) soon after it was established in Jan. 1955. Mr. Chen Yi-sein worked for M.H.C from 1956 to about 1987). When the palm-leaf manuscript arrived at UCL, I informed

¹ Retired Chief Librarian, Universities Central Library, Yangon. At present Member of the Myanmar Historical Commission.

Chen as he was the foremost authority on the subject. He became very interested in the manuscript and promised to look for relevant Chinese records in China and Taiwan. He left Myanmar a few years later to join his family in Taipei and died there.

As promised, Chen continued to carry out research about this Myanmar mission, tracing the Chinese records of the Myanmar envoys in Beijing being received in audience by the Qing Qianlong Emperor.² He then made an important discovery. The Myanmar king had sent two letters, one written on a gold plate addressed to the Chinese emperor and the other on a silver plate addressed to the empress, the queen mother, both shaped like palm-leaf manuscripts. Of the two letters, the one on gold seems to have been melted down in later times for the gold to be re-used. But surprisingly, what seems at first sight to be a copy of the letter on silver had survived and had been found and identified by Chen in the Collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei. He wrote me that he was working on a fairly long paper on this Myanmar mission to the court of the Qing emperor. For several years, he continued his researches and kept adding new information to this paper. In mid-2004, he decided to complete the research paper, which he then wrote out by hand, in his elegant Myanmar script, with some Chinese and English letters interspersed, and sent it to us in Yangon in December 2004 as his contribution to the Golden Jubilee Commemorative Volume of the Myanmar Historical Commission (MHC).

Unfortunately, Chen's paper could not be printed in the Commemorative Essays Volume because we received it too late and also, as we did not want to split it, because it was too long (ninety-six pages). It was the last paper written by Chen. We have now published this paper (The paper in Myanmar is entitled "Myanmar Min Maha-damá-ya-za-dí-patí let-htet Ta-yoke Naing-gan yauk Myanmar than a-phwei" မြန်မာမင်းမဟာဓမ္မရာဇာဓိပတိလက်ထက် တရုတ်နိုင်ငံရောက် မြန်မာသံအဖွဲ့) in the *Collected Writings of Mr. Chen Yi-sein*, in two volumes, one in Myanmar and one in English, as special publications in the MHC Golden Jubilee monograph series. The papers in Myanmar, including this last contribution of Chen, were published in 2007.

I am now editing the Myanmar text of this invaluable palm-leaf manuscript for publication. Its importance is immeasurable for it is the only Myanmar manuscript text which has survived of a number of missions from Myanmar kings to the Court of Chinese Emperors. However, due to its chaotic character, the manuscript needs careful editing.

I would like to dedicate my paper to Chen, a great but unassuming Sino-Myanmar scholar, and a life-long friend and colleague of mine. His researches on this mission revealed the bogus nature of Aye Thu Yei who came to the Myanmar King posing as the Chinese Emperor's envoy.

Another scholar, proficient both in Chinese and Myanmar, who studied the silver (or tin?) plate letter from Myanmar now in Taipei, is Dr. Sylvie Pasquet of CNRS Paris. She came to see me from 18-28 February

² For a brief life of the Qianlong Emperor (whose variant regnal dates are 1735-1796 of the Qing (Manchu) Dynasty (from A.D 1644 to 1911) see J.A.G. Roberts, *A Concise History of China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999): 155-161.

2006, and we had long discussions about the palm-leaf manuscript record and the text of the palm-leaf shaped silver plate letter. I am grateful to her for elucidating for me some of the Chinese records of the Myanmar mission.

The Palm-leaf Manuscript and its Contents

The palm-leaf manuscript is entitled *Hanthawaddy yauk Min-ta-ya let-btet Myanmar than a-phwei Ta-yoke Pyi thwa mbat-tan* (In Myanmar script: ဟံသာဝတီရောက်မင်းတရားလက်ထက် မြန်မာသံအဖွဲ့ တရုတ်ပြည် သွားမှတ်တမ်း), but this seems to be a title given by later owners as it is not given in the text itself. No name or authorship is mentioned; also there is no date of composition. It was probably compiled in the early Kòn-baung period, in the latter years of the 1750s.

The palm-leaf manuscript bundle comprises of thirty-nine leaves. The palm-leaves are innumrated in the traditional Myanmar manner, using consonants and vowels in sets of twelve. The manuscript starts with *ka* (က) and ends with *ghi* (ဂီ). Each leaf, starting with *ka* verso (i.e. the second palm leaf page) has eight lines of text to a palm-leaf page. The palm-leaf manuscript is a *kyan-hsit* (ကြံဆပ်), i.e. painted vermilion on the two length-wise edges with about four inches in the middle gilded. The *kyan-hsit* palm-leaves were used by Myanmar court officials and in manuscript donations made by them to the monasteries which they supported. As the manuscript is not a *shwe-myin*, or *shwe-bain-cha* with gilding on all four edges of the palm-leaves, it was not made for the king, or royalty. Each palm-leaf measures 49.5 cm by 5.5 cm. The palm-leaf bundle has *kyan*, top and bottom wooden covers, also painted with a kind of vermilion (red) lacquer.

The text begins rather abruptly without a proper exordium, but with just a very short prayer and then a date: Myanmar Era Sakarac 1111 *Ta-gu la-byi kyan* (Tagu waning moon) 5 (CE 15 March 1750), stating that from that date the journey began starting from the royal garden called Manaw Ramma (Manaw Rammar garden (မနေင်ရမာဥယျာဉ်), a Royal Garden in Innwa, which can be identified as being in the capital Inwa (Ava).³

The manuscript also ended abruptly without a colophon, though an important Myanmar manuscript like this one would usually have a proper colophon stating the author, the date of composition, the name of the scribe or copyist, and the date when the copy was made.

After the prayer and date, a list of cities, towns and villages is given, from palm-leaf page (from now on abbreviated as plp.) *ka* (က) verso [plp.1] to plp. *ki* (ကီ) recto [plp.6] (i.e. a total of six plp.) (To make references to palm-leaf page numbers easier to understand I have given not only the original pagination as given on the palm-leaves in the traditional manner but also numbered them with Myanmar numbers on a

³ See Twin-thin Taik-wun Maha Sithu. *Maha Yazawon Thit*, vol.3 (*Nyaung-yan-hset*) ed. by U Thein Hlaing (Yangon: Myat Mi-gin, 1997): p. 165.

copy of the manuscript and Arabic page numbers for this paper. I have also numbered each line on each page of the palm leaf). On each plp., written in two columns, are the post-stages, from a certain town to another, together with the distance between the two places given in Myanmar *ta* (a Myanmar measure of distance which could be either four cubits, seven cubits, or ten cubits). The list begins from the Royal Capital Inwa (Ava) and shows the route the Myanmar envoys took, travelling through the Shan States of Yauk Sauk and Theindi (Hsenwi) to the Chinese border, near Kaing Mar, and Bawdwin Nge-kwei (small silver mine), north of the present big Bawdwin silver mines, and through Yunnan to join the main post-stage route between Kuming and Beijing. This list of towns, villages, rivers and post-stages should be studied in conjunction with another similar list that is in this manuscript near the end, from plp. *gha* (၃၁) (no.66) to plp. *ghê* (၁၆) (no.70) where the manuscript ends. The list of post-stages at the beginning of the manuscript ends with a tabulated total of towns (71 in no.), rivers (19 in no.), post-stages (179 in no.), and total distance (1014) *taing* (တိုင်) is a Myanmar unit of distance which is equivalent to 1,000 *ta*, or approximately two miles.), (10,14.500) *ta* and (153) *yuṣṣana* (ယုṣṣာနာ [ယုṣṣာနာ]) is a Myanmar measure of distance equal to 12.72 miles), (3) *ga-wot* (ga- wot [ဂါဝုတ်]) is a Myanmar measure of distance equal to one quarter *yuṣṣana*, or approximately one league (three miles).) and twenty-five *utthaba* (utthaba [ဥထာဝါ] distance of 140 cubits) (see *ki* [ကီ] recto, plp.no. 6). U Sai Aung Tun, an authority on Shan history, has identified most of the Shan place-names shown in the manuscript (See Appendix).

The next section starts on *ki* (ကီ) verso (plp.7). It is about the Chinese emperor's capital. The Myanmar called the emperors of China *Utibwa*, or as in this manuscript, *Uti-Min* (*Min* being the Myanmar word for king or ruler). The place where the emperor resided is shown in the manuscript as *Su-chein-swan*, the inner city, *Da-si-thwan* and *Ni-ta-ok* outer cities; three cities enclosing one another with three moats complete with *padoma* lotus plants, the two inner cities with six gates each, and the outer city with nine gates. The description of the emperor's "royal city" and the royal palace is given in some detail on one plp. *ki* (ကီ) verso (plp. 7).

The next plp., *ku* (ကု) recto (plp.8) starts with another date Sakarac (henceforth abbreviated Sak.) 1113 *Wa-kehaung* waxing moon 8 (AD 19 July 1751), mentioning that the Myanmar envoys arrived at the Chinese capital on that date with ten elephants and other gifts. So, it took the Myanmar diplomatic mission one year, four months and four days to travel from Inwa to Beijing. But scholars have now discovered that they remained in Yunnan for several months before proceeding to the Chinese capital. Some of the Myanmar envoys' titles and names are stated for the first time only on plp. *Ku* (ကု) recto (plp. 8), *viṣṣ* Sawbwa of Panmaw, Aye Thu Yei, Mon-law-sei, Saw-paw-yei (on line 2) and later on line 5 the name of the translator Nga Htun is given.

The next date shown on the manuscript is Sak. 1113 *Wa-kehaung* waning moon 11 (CE 6 August 1751), when the Myanmar envoys were received by the Chinese emperor in audience; the ceremonies are described together with the names of the Chinese ministers in attendance (plp. *ku* (ကု) verso (plp. 9). Only on

this page, the name of the Myanmar chief envoy is mentioned for the first time as Thiri Kyaw Htin; his name is given *en passant* in the list of presents given in return by the Chinese emperor.

The next three pages from *k|* (၇၇) recto (plp. 10) to *kay* (၆၇) recto (plp. 12) consists of a long note about the Chinese ministers, their names (or titles), their main respective duties, e.g. Minister in charge of court ceremonies, Minister in charge of construction of pagodas, palaces, cities, roads and so on.

Then strangely from page *kay* (၆၇) verso (plp. 13) the text goes back to Sak. 1111 *Tagu* waxing moon 5 (CE 5 February 1750) when the "so-called" Chinese emperor's envoys Aye Thu Yei and Tun Ka-yei (or Tun Ta-yei) were received by the Myanmar King at Inwa and the text of the emperor's royal letter (In Myanmar ရာဇဝိသိယံ [*raja-than*] royal order, or royal letter) is given (*kay* [၆၇] verso, (plp.13) to *kaw* (၆၇၇) verso (plp.17). In the letter, the Chinese Emperor addresses the Myanmar King as younger brother and refers to himself as the elder brother. The Chinese emperor affirms the long-standing amicable relationship between the two countries and promises to subdue enemies of the Myanmar king if he is attacked. It also refers to two earlier letters sent by the emperor to the Myanmar King in Sak. 1109 (CE 1747-48) and Sak. 1110 (CE 1748-49). The Chinese emperor mentions that there has been a break in relationship between the two countries and no envoys had been sent by the two respective rulers for 150 years.

On plp. *kaw* (၆၇၇) recto (plp.16) there is a geographical demarcation in the Chinese Emperor's (faked) letter stating that the younger brother (Myanmar king) is given territory to govern from Kaing Ma (Gengma),⁴ Maing Maing (Meng Meng, Shuang Jiang), Maing Maing (Maing Maing is repeated twice; probably a copyist error), Maing Hlwei Thi-sin in the East to the Yodaya (Ayutthaya) and beyond Lin Zin (Laos) to Myet-hna-mei (Vietnam) with the ocean as the limit to the territory in the North (there is of course no Ocean to the north, but only the Himalaya mountain range). The "umbrella wearing," i.e. high-ranking kings, are rulers from Bagan, Moe Byei, Pakhan, Mottama (Martaban), Hanthawaddy, Bago, Than Hlyin (Syriam), Toungoo, Sagaing, Tei-tin(?), Kalay, Thaung Thut, Theindi (Hsenwi), Dawei (Tavoy), altogether fourteen cities and towns. Aye Thu Yei is mentioned in this letter as the ruler of the La-wa city/town; the La-wa are the Wa people of the Myanmar-China border. The letter also mentions that Aye Thu Yei must travel to the Myanmar capital and return to the Chinese Emperor within a period of eight months (*kaw* (၆၇၇) verso plp.17, line 3) and that the two rulers should be *Raja Maha Meit*, or Royal Friends and Allies.

On plp. *kaw* (၆၇၇) recto, (plp. 18) the Myanmar king's title is mentioned for the first time as Mahadamá-ya-za-dí-patí. This Myanmar king is stated to have received emissaries from Utibwa, the Chinese emperor, led by Aye Thu Yei, with a letter expressing eternal friendship and for the two countries to be as one for trade and business purposes (plp. *kaw* (၆၇၇) verso, plp. 19). Mention is also made of eight Brahmā

⁴ The Chinese name is given in parenthesis. I am grateful to Dr. Sylvie Pasquet of CNRS in Paris for identifying some of the Chinese towns.

images sent by the Chinese emperor, and other presents (according to Chen Yi-sein there are no Chinese records of such a mission being sent by the Chinese Emperor to the Myanmar King at that period.⁵

Plp. *Kam* (ကံ) verso (plp. 20) goes back to the mission sent by the Myanmar king led by minister Thiri Kyaw Htin together with Aye Thu Yei, Tun Ta-yei and a list of presents sent by the Myanmar king. It also mentions a letter sent to the Chinese emperor by four great Myanmar ministers or military commanders called *Agga Maha Thayna-dipati*, again expressing a wish for the two rulers to be friends and allies.

I have given above some details of the historical data that can be found in the first (20) palm-leaf manuscript pages, out of a total of seventy plp. that form this manuscript bundle containing records about the Myanmar diplomatic mission to China (AD 1750 to 1752). I will summarize the information recorded in the rest of the palm-leaf manuscript, i.e the next fifty plp., from plp twenty to plp. seventy its abrupt end.

To seal the alliance, the Myanmar king requested for the hand of either one of the daughters, a granddaughter, or a niece of the Chinese emperor (*kā*) (ကော) recto, plp. twenty-two.

The manuscript then gives the names of three other members of the Myanmar Mission who were appointed as *sar-yei-daw* (royal secretaries) together with instructions from the Myanmar king. They were envoy Thiri Kyaw Htin, *raja-taman* (royal envoy) Kyaw Pike Thiha, and Ei-bya yei (probably a Mon) (*kha*) (ခ) verso, plp. 25).

The reason for appointing the Theindi (Hsenwi) *sawbwa* as one of the main leaders of the Myanmar mission was because he understood the Chinese language (Rone-ywon Taroke Tayet ယွန်တရုတ်တရက် ဘာသာ) (*kā*) (ခါ) recto, plp. 26) and could act as an interpreter.

There is data on the appointment of the envoys on Sakarac 1111 *Tagu* waning moon 2 (CE 2 March 1750), three days before the mission left the Myanmar capital, in the presence of two chief Buddhist *hsayadams* (presiding monks). Aung-mye Shwe-bon and Aung-mye Tu-lut. The dimensions of the gold plate letter are then given together with its weight and it is stated that there are 12 lines of writing on the plate. A detailed list of presents for the Chinese emperor, and the Chinese queen mother is given. Also valuable presents given to Tun Ta-yei, Aye Thu Yei and the Theindi *sawbwa*, not only by the Myanmar king, but also by his queens, and gifts from even the two senior presiding Buddhist abbots (their names / titles are shown above the list of presents that each gave).⁶

Some queens of the western palace seems to have missed the Mission before it left Inwa, so they followed to Sint-gaing where they caught up with it on Sakarac 1111 *Ka-sone* waxing moon 6 (CE 30 March 1750), about fifteen days later. There seems to have been a furor amongst the queens vying with each other to give presents to the envoys, especially to the Chinese Aye Thu Yei.

A list of the ten elephants sent as the Myanmar king's royal gift is then given. Eight were for the Chinese emperor and two for his mother. Also, two elephants each were given to Aye Thu Yei, and to the

⁵ See *Selected writings of Mr. Chen Yi-sein* (in Myanmar) . . . Yangon: Historical Research Department, 2007): p. 395.

⁶ (*kha*) (ခါ) verso to *kbi* (ခီ) recto, plp. 27-30).

Theindi *sambwa*, *kē* (၀၆) recto (plp. 30). This information is repeated on *gū* (၇) recto (plp.52). Each of the fourteen elephants have their individual names or titles, height, age, length of tusks, and name of each *Uxi*, or elephant trainer/ handler, given in detail. There are notes on *kē* (၀၆) verso (plp.31), repeated on *gū* (၇) verso (plp.53) that the elephants given as royal presents were bred and brought up in the royal palace compound, unlike other elephants, and given away only because of the great affection and friendship that the Myanmar king had for Utibwa, the Chinese emperor. The elephants were of a special large-sized breed, that they were carefully chosen to be of prime age (between ten and twenty-eight years old) when they were strongest and healthiest, to be able go on the long arduous trek and to climb high mountains during the journey. There is much repetitive data in the remainder of the palm-leaf manuscript.

One of the most important pieces of information found in the latter part of the manuscript is the text of a letter, the Myanmar king's *Yaza-than*, written on gold. This is found in the manuscript from *khaw* (၆၁) verso (plp.39) to *khāw* (၆၁) recto (plp.40). The Myanmar king mentioned that he is sending the envoys to mark the great friendship he has as a younger brother to the Chinese emperor. The Myanmar king also mentioned in his letter that he received the envoys sent by the Chinese emperor led by Aye Thu Yei and Dun Ta Yei (or Tuan Teh Yei) and knew about the friendship that the Chinese emperor had for the Myanmar king. He also stated that the two countries are *Yaza Maha Meit* (Great Royal Allies) for the prosperity of all the people, monks, etc., that this friendship should continue forever through the sons and grandsons, that the Myanmar king recognizes the demarcations mentioned in the Chinese emperor's letter and that enemies of the elder brother will be regarded as enemies of the younger brother and vice-versa (i.e. they are eternal allies). The presents received and sent back are mentioned, and to end the letter the Myanmar king requested the Chinese emperor to send back the Myanmar envoys as quickly as possible to seal the alliance.

The text of the other important letter is given on *gū* (၇) verso (plp. 53) to the end of *gai* (၆၀) recto (plp. 54). This is the text of the letter on the silver, (or tin?) plate, now preserved in the National Palace Museum in Taipei, as a national treasure.⁷

The manuscript also records the texts of the Myanmar king's instructions and royal orders issued with regard to this diplomatic mission. First a general order for the Shan *sambwas* to give assistance and protection to the Mission during the journey through their territory, also special royal proclamations (*bya-daik tam*) to the Lord of Maing-Si (i.e. the Viceroy of Yunnan and Kuei-chou), and to the Lord of Tali and so on. Myanmar king's royal order appointing minister Thiri Kyaw Htin, Aye Thu Yei and Dun Ta Yei with the *sambwa* of Theindi (Hsenwi) as the king's special envoys is also given.

The information given in the manuscript actually ends on p. *gā* (၇၆) plp.67, as the rest of the manuscript is a repetition in a slightly different format of the itinerary between Innwa and Beijing.

We are told on p. *gā* (၇၆) plp. 67 that the Myanmar mission had arrived back at the (Myanmar) frontier, and was informed that even at Theindi (Hsenwi) the whole region was in turmoil and the mission

⁷ Jacques Leider provided the author a translation of and comments about this letter.

was ordered to wait for the Myanmar king's (welcoming) party which would be dispatched with soldiers to guard the envoys bearing valuable the gifts sent by the Chinese emperor and accompany them back to the capital Inwa. But probably this detachment never came because the capital was besieged and later captured by Mon rebels. The king, the royal family and the ministers were all taken captive to Hanthawadi where the king was later executed.

Beyond the Manuscript

Aye Thu Yei- Interpreter or Impostor?

The name, or rather the title of what the Myanmar king and later Myanmar chroniclers and historians accepted as the Chinese emperor's envoy, Aye Thu Yei (အေထူးရဲ), is a Burmanised name which seems at first glance to be a familiar Myanmar title. "Thu Yei" in Myanmar means "a brave person" and is usually applied to a warrior or soldier as in Thu Yei Kaung, a hero or a man of physical and moral courage. Up to the present Aye (or sometimes transcribed as E) (in Myanmar အဲ; or ိ) is a common name element for Myanmar people in such names as Aye Maung (or E Maung).

All the three main Myanmar chronicles which cover the late Nyaungyan Period (1711 to 1752) mention this Chinese emperor's envoy by name as Aye Thu Yei, except in the published, printed edition of the third volume (Nyaungyan Period), edited by U Thein Hlaing, of Twin-thin Taik-wun Maha Sithu's *Maha Yazawin Thit*,⁸ where probably due to a copying or transcription error "Aye" has been given as "Za" (ဇ), so Aye Thu Yei has become Za Thu Yei which is obviously incorrect. *Hman-nàn maha-ya-zawin-daw-gyi* (*The Glass Palace Chronicle*), compiled in 1829, has a good account of a Chinese emperor's mission to the Myanmar court of Maha-damá-ya-za-dí-patí, led by Aye Thu Yei and Dun Ta Yei (ဒုန်တေရဲ). They came with a gift of eight Arbathara Brahma images, accompanied by five thousand retainers (mostly soldiers).

A fuller account of this Chinese diplomatic mission can be read in the still unpublished palm-leaf manuscript chronicle *Maha Yazawin Kyaw* compiled by the Monywè Hsayadaw (1766-1835).⁹ Aye Thu Yei's name and an account of his diplomatic mission are also given in the palm-leaf manuscript version of *Alaung Mintaya-gyi Ayedawbon*, by Letwe Nawrahta (1723-1791).¹⁰

⁸ Twin- thin Taik-wun Maha Sithu, *Maha Yazawin Thit*, vol. 3, *Nyaungyan Hset*; ed. by U Thein Hlaing (Yangon: Myat Migin, 1997): p. 165.

⁹ *Maha Yazawin Kyaw*, or *Yazawinda Yazawaya—mandani Yazawin* ... hand-written and typescript copies of original palm-leaf manuscript (at one time in Mon-ywe Zetawun Monastery.) Palm-leaf *Nyan-recto* (နယံဝဇ္ဇိ) to *Nyā recto* (ညာ:ဝဇ္ဇိ). Copies available at the Universities Historical Research Centre Library.

¹⁰ Letwe Nawrahta *Alaung Mintaya-gyi Ayedawbon*, Palm-leaf manuscript. University of Mandalay Library, Now being edited for publication by Daw Ohn Kyi of the Myanmar Historical Commission), by Letwe Nawrahta (1723-1791).

The most important account of Aye Thu Yei is undoubtedly the palm-leaf manuscript that this paper is focusing on. Chen Yi-sein was able to unravel the original Chinese title which Myanmar people had Burmanized as Aye Thu Yei, by first studying this palm-leaf manuscript account of the Myanmar king's mission to the Chinese emperor.

This manuscript gave three indications of Aye Thu Yei's identity:

- (1) that he was a leader of the Wa (or Lawa) people of the Myanmar-China frontier region,
- (2) that he was also known as the Baw sawbwa, i.e. the *sawbwa*, or chieftan of Baw or Silver (mines) and
- (3) that the Baw sawbwa was also known as Wu Thin Yi.

These three clues enabled Chen to positively identify Aye Thu Yei as Wu Shang-hsein, the self-styled leader of the Wa people and a leading Chinese official at the silver mines, in charge of the thousands of Chinese and Wa miners.

Chen searched for Chinese sources and found biographical data about Wu Shang-hsien in two Chinese historical records: (1) *Historical Materials of the Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties*, and (2) Chang Chifa's *A Study of the Ten Military Accomplishments of Emperor Kao-tsung of the Ch'ing Dynasty*.¹¹ As I do not know the Chinese language, I will summarize below Chen Yi-sein's account of Wu Shang-hsien whom the Myanmar people called Aye Thu Yei.¹²

Around early 1745 an impoverished Chinese man from Shih-ping Prefecture left his native village to try his fortune at the Mao-toong silver mines of the Wa mountainous region. The Wa Sawbwa P'ang-chu soon noticed this clever, enterprising and trustworthy young miner and took him into his service. The Governor of Yunnan also trusted him and appointed him as a Collector of Taxes at these silver mines. Wu was so successful at his jobs that he received many rewards and was able to purchase before long the post of T'oong-p'an, or Assistant to the Sub- Prefect.

Chen points out that at this time there were about twenty to thirty thousand Chinese and Wa miners at the silver mines. Therefore, Wu become quite an influential person as the foremost leader. In Chinese the three top leaders were called Ta- yeh (First Leader), Esh- yeh (Second Leader) and San- yeh (Third Leader) – so Wu became known as Ta- yeh, the First Leader. This is similar to the second part of the Myanmar name for Wu, Thu Yei. However, Wu also had a nickname; because he was short-legged, stout, bearded and fierce, the local people called him “Ai-chiao-hu,” or “short- legged tiger.” Chen wrote that Ai-chiao-hu became Ai-hu-yeh, a mixture of the First Leader's title and Wu's nickname. In Myanmar the ha (ဝ) and the tha (ထ) which come next to each other in the Myanmar alphabetical order sometimes gets transposed, so “hu” became “thu” and thus Ai- thu-yeh, or in Myanmar pronunciation Aye Thu Yei, from the Chinese word

¹¹ *Ming-ch'ing- shih-liao*. Taipei: Academia Sinica, Institute of History and Languages, 1953. Section 7, Vol. 7. In Chinese.

¹² Chang Chi-fa, *Ch'ing-Kao-tsung shih-ch'uan wu- kung yen-chiu* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1982). In Chinese.

meaning “short- legged tiger gentleman” or “Fierce First Leader.” This seems to be a very plausible derivation and explanation; scholars who know both Myanmar and Chinese languages¹³ should examine this carefully to see whether it is correct and acceptable. For us who do not know Chinese, the identification of Aye Thu Yei with Wu Shang-hsien is a gratifying solution to a baffling name from Myanmar historical records.

We are grateful to Chen for not only solving the origins of the name Aye Thu Yei, but also for a much more important revelation. He checked Chinese records for the mid-eighteenth century and found that the Chinese emperor did not send envoys to the Myanmar king in 1750. This new information will greatly alter what Myanmar historians and people have accepted over the last two and a half centuries. It is easy to dismiss Aye Thu Yei as an impostor who, with immense ambition, planned and carried out a big hoax for personal gain, both financial and political. But if we try to understand his mission in the wider context of Myanmar-China relationship over the centuries, later historians may be able to see him also not only as a bogus envoy, but also as a kind of interpreter, a liaison between Yunnan and Myanmar.

The Myanmar people usually referred to the Emperor of China as Udi or Utibwa as shown in our manuscript. But often the Myanmar leaders and the people had more dealings with the Chinese Governor of Yunnan and the Yunnanese people, especially its merchants and entrepreneurs. Therefore, as G. E. Harvey points out, Utibwa also often meant the Governor, or Ruler of Yunnan to the Myanmar.¹⁴ Utibwa comes from the Pali *udi* meaning “the rising sun” and thus, the east, and *bwa* as in sawbwa means “chief,” or “ruler.” So Utibwa is “Ruler of the East.” There is a further confusion in our manuscript, which refers also to the Myanmar king as the King of the Rising Sun.

When Aye Thu Yei posed as Utibwa's envoy when he went to the Myanmar king in 1750 and was accepted as such, his mission would have been known to the Governor of Yunnan, Zhang Yun-sui, who most probably gave tacit approval because the Yunnanese, who depended on and profited from trade and commerce with Myanmar, wanted better relations with the Myanmar king and court.

Aye Thu Yei and the Governor of Yunnan knew that the Myanmar king wanted to form an alliance with the Chinese emperor. This last king of the Nyaungyan Dynasty was a descendant of Bayín-naung. Bayín-naung was a strong and able military commander and an astute ruler who was able to control the largest territories of any Myanmar king. But the last of his descendants to rule Myanmar, King Maha-damá-ya-za-dí-patí, had none of these military and administrative abilities. He was a weak ruler who wanted to spend more

¹³ Pasquet is just such a scholar, proficient in Chinese and Myanmar languages. She came to see me in February 2006. I gave her a copy of Chen Yi-sein's paper in Myanmar and she later told me that his conclusions are accurate. She has written a paper in Chinese about the Burmese tributary message on silver leaf preserved in the National Palace Museum and is now preparing a separate research monograph on Wu Shang-hsein.

¹⁴ See note on Utibwa in G. E. Harvey's *History of Burma* . . . (London: Longmans, Green, 1925): p. 30.

time with his books and talking with learned persons, rather than taking an interest in maintaining his empire.¹⁵

Dr. Maung Htin Aung, a versatile academic who produced the *History of Burma*, the first general history in English by a Myanmar scholar, has these comments on another bogus Chinese Mission originating in Yunnan, about forty years later than Aye Thu Yei's mission:

The Sawbwa of Bhamo and some Chinese merchants from Yunnan were especially interested in the full resumption of trade relations, and they conspired to hoodwink both the emperor and Bodawpaya [King of Myanmar, r. 1782-1819]. They brought a bogus mission purporting to be from the Chinese Emperor, and Bodawpaya received it with due honour. When Bodawpaya sent a return mission to Peking, the conspirators arranged that the mission's own interpreter should become separated from the mission on the journey. Then as the mission arrived before the emperor the conspirators explained that the mission was bringing tribute. The emperor was pleased and ordered full resumption of trade. Sometime later the conspirators again brought a bogus mission with three beautiful Chinese girls who were said to be the emperors grand-daughters. Bodawpaya now realized that he had been fooled and put the Sawbwa of Bhamo under arrest. Whether the emperor of China ever found out the truth is not known, but the conspirators did achieve their objective — normal trade relations were restored.¹⁶

Harvey, on the other hand, wrote that Bò-daw-hpayà never found out about the hoax, and that the king “may have willingly misunderstood the interpreters” [in thinking the three Yunnanese girls were the Chinese emperor's granddaughters]. Harvey also makes a disparaging comment stating that Myanmar rulers, over the ages, “had a voracious appetite for self-deception.”¹⁷

Concluding Remarks

Aye Thu Yei's bogus mission might have achieved success like similar missions in Bò-daw-hpayà's time (circa 1790) and forged an alliance between Myanmar and China and thus restored trade relations. Due to him, the Myanmar king and the Chinese emperor exchanged royal letters pledging long lasting friendship and calling for trade and commerce to be revived and strengthened. But four unforeseen events resulted in making Aye Thu Yei's mission a total and tragic failure, though this is not stated in the palm-leaf manuscript.

¹⁵ Dr. Yi Yi. *Myanmar Naing-gan a-chai a-nai, 1714-52*. Yangon: Naing-gan Thamaing Thu-tay-tha-na Uzi-htana [BHC], 1973. p.185-86. One of the best books on Myanmar during the time of the Nyaungyan Dynasty's last two kings, 1714-52.

¹⁶ Maung Htin Aung. *A History of Burma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967): p. 199-200.

¹⁷ G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma . . .* (1925): p. 279-280 and also his Note on "Chinese embassies," p. 362.

Maha-damá-ya-za-dí-patí, the Myanmar royal family, and the court were all captured by Mon rebels and taken to Hanthawaddy (Bago/Pegu) on 11 March 1752,¹⁸ so the Myanmar mission to China did not return to Innwa (Ava) to report to the King who sent them about two years earlier. We now know from Chinese sources that a new Governor of Yunnan was appointed at the time the Myanmar envoys returned. This new Governor became suspicious and alarmed at the growing influence of Aye Thu Yei. Third, this new governor arrested Aye Thu Yei towards the end of 1751 for going to the Myanmar king in 1750 pretending to be the Chinese emperor's envoy, and for forging a royal letter purportedly emanating from the Emperor. Aye Thu Yei died in prison soon after. Nonetheless, up to the present he is venerated by the Wa people on the China side of the border as a leader who looked after and protected them, and brought prosperity during his leadership.¹⁹

Fourth, the Myanmar leader of the mission, Minister Thiri Kyaw Htin also died in Yunnan, on 21 November 1751, on the return journey, from an unspecified disease he had been suffering for a number of years. The long strenuous journey across mountains and forests resulted in the fatal deterioration of his health.

In writing about the past it is always intriguing to speculate about what might have happened if some important things had not occurred. If the four tragic events given above had not taken place, and the Myanmar mission had returned safely with the Chinese emperor's letter to Innwa and reported to the Myanmar king, the two countries could have become strong allies.

The Myanmar king wanted the support of the Chinese emperor and Qing military might to crush Manipuri invaders and Mon rebels. If the Qing army had defeated Myanmar's foreign and domestic enemies, the tottering Nyaungyan Dynasty might have lasted a few more years.

Also the Qianlong Emperor whom Aye Thu Yei met might not have launched the "most disastrous frontier war that the Qing Dynasty had ever waged,"²⁰ by attacking Myanmar between 1765 and 1770, and failing to control some parts of the Shan States.

Finally coming back to our palm-leaf manuscript Record of the Myanmar mission, we can see at once that it is not a proper report submitted to the Myanmar king, as for example the Report of a Myanmar Mission to Bengal in 1830.²¹

My personal opinion is that the secretaries (*sa-yei-daw-gyi*) and scribes taken along on the mission made notes of the journey, royal letters exchanged, instructions received, presents given, and other important

¹⁸ *Hman-nan Maha Yazawin-daw-gyi* . . . 8th ed. (Yangon: Thiha Yadana Sarpay, 2008, reprint): p. 799.

¹⁹ Personal communication from Dr. Sylvie Pasquet, 18th Feb. 2006.

²⁰ Yingcong Dai, "A Disguised Defeat: The Myanmar Campaign of the Qing Dynasty," *Modern Asian Studies* 38.1 (2004): p. 145.

²¹ See Myanmar Historical Commission, Research Monograph no. 2 entitled *Bingala thwa sar-dan*, edited by Daw Kyan. Yangon: The Commission, 1963.

information, probably on black paper parabiike note-books. These notes could have ended up in a personal collection and later given to a monastic library. Someone who saw these notes probably got interested in the records and, knowing their historical value, copied them on palm-leaves for a more permanent record. But the copying was not done systematically, some data were recopied two or even three times, and the data was not copied in a logical or chronological order. But we have to thank this anonymous person or persons for saving the records of this failed mission to China for posterity.

I am now trying to sort the information contained in the manuscript, taking out the repetition data and putting the rest in a chronological, logical order. After careful editing I will publish it, if possible, with Chen's notes. This would make the text and notes more accessible to all scholars

Further research needs to be done, not only on this Myanmar mission to the Chinese emperor, but also on both earlier (from the Pyu and Bagan periods) and later missions up to the time of King Mindon (1853-1878), the penultimate king before the last dynasty, the Kòn-baung, was terminated in 1885 when the British captured Mandalay and exiled King Thibaw to India. Scholars who are proficient in both Myanmar and Chinese languages could help us to understand more about the important relationship between Myanmar and China in the past and the intermediary, interpretive role played by the leaders, merchants and people of Yunnan and the Shan State, together with some of our ethnic groups from this region like the Wa and Shan themselves. Only then will we be able to see in better perspective the long standing, thousand years old relationship between Myanmar and China which has assumed more and more importance in recent years.

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Appendix

List of Place-names in the Shan Area

As given in the palm-leaf manuscript record of the Myanmar Diplomatic Mission to China, during the reign of Hanthawaddy yauk Mintara (Maha-damá-ya-za-dí-patí, 1733-1752).

From the golden city (capital) of Innwa, Myanmar...

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Kan Thit Ywa (village) | 31. Baw (Maw) 'Twin Nge' (town) |
| 2. Shan Pike Taw Ywa (village) | 32. Nam Se |
| 3. Yan Htaik Kway Ywa (village) | 33. Baw Long Hsan Twin Kyi (Gyi) |
| 4. Myo Gyi | 34. Pang Pin Ywa (village) |
| 5. Chaung Yoe Seik Sakhan | 35. Nam Paing Ywa (village) |
| 6. At the foot of the Pagoda? | 36. Mong Hkan in Wa Town |
| 7. Nong San Ywa (village) | 37. Mong Kaw Kung Ma |
| 8. Lawk Sauk | 38. Mong Nwe (Noi) |
| 9. Man Pan Ywa (village) | 39. Pang Saung |
| 10. Mong Pyin Myo (town) | 40. Kung Ma Town |
| 11. Nam Oat Taw Sakhan | 41. Mong Hsa |
| 12. Mong Lin Ywa (village) | 42. Ho Hko |
| 13. Ho Hko Ywa (village) | 43. Mong Nyaung |
| 14. Mong Ling Myo (town) | 44. Pang Kwe in China |
| 15. Loi Lin Ywa (village) | 45. Mong Kyo |
| 16. Pang Maw Ywa (village) | 46. Me Pa Chauk Kin Ywa (village) |
| 17. Arrived Hsenwi at Pang Nim village | 47. Shan Shin Kun Ywa (village) |
| 18. Arrived Mong Tong at Hsup Tong Ywa (village) | 48. Mong Hkam Myo (town) |
| 19. Mong La Ywa (village) | 49. Mong Lin Myo (town) |
| 20. Pang Maw Ywa (village) in Hsenwi. | 50. Hte' Pyi Shaw Ywa (village) |
| 21. Mong Sit Ywa (village) | 51. Long Lin Ywa (village) near Mekong River |
| 22. Kar Lay Ywa (village) | 52. Hsan Ywa at Law Kya |
| 23. Hman Me' Ywa (village) | 53. Mu Kwa Myo (town) |
| 24. Mong Liem Ywa (village) | 54. Mong Ku Ywa (village) in Ta Lin |
| 25. MongYaw Myo (town) | 55. Mong Si's Area (around present-day Kuming) |
| 26. Mong Kyit | |
| 27. Nam Taw Ywa (village) | Compiled by U Sai Aung Tun, February 2006 |
| 28. Mong Lin Ywa (village) | Vice-Chairman, |
| 29. Kun Long Ywa (village) | Myanmar Historical Commission, |
| 30. Mong Pin Ywa (village) | Yangon. |

THE GOLDEN ROCK AT KYAIK-HTI-YO

Donald M. Stadtner

The Golden Rock ranks with the Shwedagon and the Mahamuni as a solid member of Burma's sacred triumvirate, yet its history is the most obscure. The hair relics of the Buddha believed to be inside the granite boulder are the objects of devotion, but the rock's sanctity owes as much to its rich legacy. How this 611.45 ton granite boulder balancing on a cliff side in a remote mountain range came to achieve national veneration is testimony to not only the tenacious continuity of old legends but also their remarkable elasticity. If myths are to survive and flourish, then they must be nimble and able to change with new circumstances.

The present modest and preliminary exploration sketches the major historical sources surrounding Kyaik-hti-yo and suggests how the Golden Rock grew to be one of Burma's most sacred sites. Its history is plagued by gaps, but its general outline can be pieced together.

The Kyaik-hti-yo tradition can be traced to an important fifteenth-century Mon myth centered on six hair relics the Buddha presented to six hermits. These unnamed recluses returned to their hermitages in locations between Rangoon and the Thaton area, but Kyaik-hti-yo was not among them. This basic Mon myth survived the loss of Pegu and Lower Burma to Burmese forces in the sixteenth century and provided a firm but fluid foundation on which many later myths in Lower Burma were constructed, often in unexpected ways. A hair relic became attached to the Golden Rock probably sometime in the seventeenth century, but the exact nature of the legend at that time is unknown. The myth permuted over the centuries until it attained its present shape in the early twentieth century, ingeniously bringing together many disparate elements in order to elevate the primacy of Kyaik-hti-yo.

The present article reflects the insights of a number of colleagues, principally U Tun Aung Chain and Patrick Pranke. Special thanks also are to Mathias Jenny who supplied English translations of sections from two Mon texts, *Uppanna Sudhammawati-rajawamsakattha* and *Gavampati*. Elizabeth Moore also provided an English translation by U San Win of a portion of unnamed Mon chronicle translated into Burmese in 1784 and a copy of an important forthcoming study by U San Win. Others with whom I have shared various drafts or discussed topics related to the present article include Benedicte Brac de la Perriere, Robert Brown, Jason Carbine, Jon Fernquest, Pamela Gutman, Justin McDaniel, and Elizabeth Moore. Nai Pan Hla prepared English translations of the fifteenth-century Mon inscriptions for me in 1987; Burmese translations of the same Mon inscriptions are cited in U Chit Thein, *Shei-buang Mon Kyauksa Paung-khyup* (1965). Most of the same fifteenth-century inscriptions are named, numbered and briefly described by H. L. Shorto in his *A Dictionary of Mon Inscriptions* (Shorto 1970); to facilitate cross references to Shorto and U Chit Thein, I have supplied the numbers that Shorto and U Chit Thein arbitrarily assigned to the inscriptions in their respective publications. This article is an expansion of a section on Kyaik-hti-yo for a forthcoming book, *Sacred Sites of Burma* (River Books, Bangkok).



Fig. 1. The 611.45 ton granite boulder is thought to contain three hair relics of the Buddha, a Mon myth stemming from the fifteenth century.

The Kyaik-hti-yo legacy represents a completely separate tradition from that of the Shwedagon Pagoda which focuses on eight hair relics that the Buddha bestowed on two Mon merchants in Bodhgaya. Both myths took shape in the fifteenth-century among the Mon in Lower Burma and both underwent dramatic changes over the centuries. The Shwedagon legend, however, is rooted in a single spot, whereas the locations and the lore surrounding the six hair relics is far more diffuse and has been subject to greater and wider interpretations through the ages. The core of the Shwedagon legend (two brothers meeting the Buddha at Bodhgaya) was also anchored in the Pali Canon and its early commentaries, whereas early canonical literature never speaks of the Buddha visiting Lower Burma and dispensing relics (Pe Maung Tin).



Fig. 2. Thagyamin, center, with Tissa the Hermit, right, and Bo Bo Aung. Kyaik-hti-yo

The Legend Today

The current legend is contained in a publication issued by the Pagoda Trustees in 1997, which follows largely a statement by the Ministry of Information in 1949 (Aung Than: 25-26; Moore 2004: 163). It begins with the Buddha visiting Thaton and distributing six hair relics equally to three hermits who came to Thaton from three different nearby hilltops. Two of the three were brothers. The elder, often named Tissa, resided on Mt. Kyaik-hti-yo and was the foster-father of the King of Thaton. The Kyaik-hti-yo hermit kept his two relics in his topknot. His younger brother hermit, commonly called Siha, dwelt on Mt. Zingyaik where he deposited one hair in a stupa and the second relic on Mt. Zwegabin. This younger brother hermit living on Mt. Zingyaik was the foster-father of Gavampati, a boy who died in childhood and who became a disciple of the Buddha in India in another birth. Both Gavampati and his older brother, the King of Thaton, were born from eggs produced by a snake-maiden, or *naga-ma*, disguised as a lovely woman, who coupled with a wizard, or *zangyi*.

The third hermit, often called Tila, lived on Mt. Kelasa where he interred one of his two hair relics in a stupa and kept the other. At the death of the hermit on Mt. Kelasa, the Kyaik-hti-yo hermit obtained the hair relic that was not placed in a stupa and added it to his two already secreted away in his topknot. As the Kyaik-hti-yo hermit himself neared death, his son, who was the King of Thaton, together with Thagyamin, or

Sakka (Pali), persuaded the Kyaik-hti-yo hermit to relinquish his three relics for enshrinement in a pagoda that could be worshipped by all. The recluse assented but demanded that Thagyamin locate a stone reliquary that resembled the shape of his head. Thagyamin scoured the universe and returned with the huge granite boulder in which he placed all three hair relics. The Kyaik-hti-yo hermit then died, gazing at the Golden Rock, his wish fulfilled.

This version was probably formulated in the early twentieth century but combined centuries-old elements in an ingenious fashion. The intricacies of the legend are far from the minds and hearts of the majority of pilgrims for whom it is enough to believe that a hermit enshrined one or more hairs relics in a rock that resembled the shape of the hermit's head, conveyed there by Thagyamin.

The key locations and protagonists are outlined in the following table, a handy 'who's who' in the 'Kyaik-hti-yo Myth.' The names vary in accounts, both old and modern.

Hilltops, Hermits, Monks and Kings	
Mt. Kyaik-hti-yo	Hermit Tissa; two hairs, both in topknot; raised the future King of Thaton; obtained a third hair from Hermit Tila on Mt. Kelasa
Mt. Kelasa	Hermit Tila; two hairs, one in pagoda and one under worship
Mt. Zingyaik	Hermit Siha; two hairs, one in pagoda on Mt. Zingyaik, second in pagoda on Mt. Zwegabin; raised Gavampati who died in childhood, reborn in India
Monk Gavampati	Disciple of the Buddha and younger brother to the King of Thaton; hatched from a snake-egg, raised by Hermit Siha
Siha Raja	King of Thaton, older brother to Gavampati; hatched from a snake-egg, raised by the Kyaik-hti-yo Hermit
Snake goddess (<i>naga-ma</i>) and Wizard (<i>zawgyi</i>)	This couple produced Gavampati and King of Thaton

Kyaik-hti-yo Hill also became entwined with a popular regional *nat* known as Shwe Nan Kyin. Despite her negligible role in the narrative, as Queen of Thaton, her presence at Kyaik-hti-yo is pervasive, worshipped by peasants and generals alike. When exactly she became attached to the site is difficult to fix, but it probably occurred by the late nineteenth century. Her importance at Kyaik-hti-yo underscores the seamless blend of indigenous and Theravada traditions that so characterizes Burma and much of Southeast Asia.



Fig. 3. Tissa the Hermit dying, held by the king's minister. Thaton king on right. Kyaik-hti-yo



Fig. 4. Lower Burma. Principal sites.

An Annotated Chronology of Key Sources		
Source	Date	Details provided
Inscriptions	Fifteenth Century	Six hermits visited Thaton and received single hair relics; one strand was replicated twice for two more hermits; Gavampati and the King of Thaton are unspecified kinsmen in a past life. The hermits are unnamed and without biographies. Relic stupas ranged from the Rangoon area to the Thaton region. No reference to Kyaik-hti-yo; only Mt. Kelasa, near Thaton, can be identified as one of the six locations.
Ū Kalà's <i>Great Chronicle</i> (<i>Maha-yazawin-gyi</i>)	c. 1725	A donation at Kyaik-hti-yo ("Itharo") is made by King Pyei (1661-1672); no information on hermits, relics or boulder; earliest reference to Kyaik-hti-yo's importance.
<i>Gavampati Chronicle</i>	c. 1710	The hermit on Kyaik-hti-yo Hill is one of only three hermits who obtained hair relics; Gavampati and the King of Thaton are brothers, hatched from the eggs of a snake-goddess; two additional groups of recluses came to Thaton and accepted hair relics from the Buddha; a single hair relic was thought to be at Kyaik-hti-yo during this period.
Unnamed Mon chronicle	translated into Burmese in 1784	Six hermits connected to six hilltops, one of which is Kyaik-hti-yo; one hair relic per hilltop. List includes hills that become key in the modern myth, namely, Kyaik-hti-yo, Kelasa, and Zingyaik.
Taw Sein Ko	1891	Kyaik-hti-yo is one of three hilltops associated with hermits and hair relics (Kyaik-hti-yo, Kelasa and Kusinara); the modern myth differs from this greatly and was formulated after 1891, perhaps about 1900 or later.
Ministry of Information	1949	This version, perhaps dating to around 1900 or later, is the current one and is also reflected in a publication by the Pagoda Trustees, 1997. The hermit at Kyaik-hti-yo is the foster-father of the Thaton king; hermit's brother is a hermit on Mt. Zingyaik; third hermit is on Mt. Kelasa; all three hermits received two hair relics from the Buddha in Thaton; Kyaik-hti-yo hermit relinquishes his two relics and one belonging to Mt. Kelasa hermit to his adopted son (the Thaton King) and Thagyamin who interred the three hair relics in the granite boulder.
Note: The dates of these sources merely reflect the times at which the inscriptions were incised or the texts were compiled; the appearance of legends in inscriptions and chronicles should not be understood of course as the starting point of a myth but rather as the moment when a legend has attained a certain threshold of popularity and acceptance.		

The Six Hair Relics: the Inscriptions of Dhammaceti

The Kyaik-hti-yo myth stretches back into the fifteenth century when Lower Burma was in the hands of the Mon. The legend is known only from some ten epigraphs found between Pegu and the Thaton area, that is, within a wide arch facing the Gulf of Martaban (Chit Thein; Shorto 1971: xxx-xxxii). All are datable to the reign of King Dhammaceti (1470-1492), but only two have survived with specific dates, at Payagyi, near Pegu, and at Mt. Kelasa, near Thaton, both from 1486 (Chit Thein: nos. 87, 91; Shorto 1971: xxxi-xxxii, nos. 50, 72).

The formulaic inscriptions state that the Buddha was invited to visit Thaton by a monk named Gavampati in the eighth year following the enlightenment. The Thaton king, known as Sirimasoka, was Gavampati's kinsmen in a previous life in Lower Burma; after Gavampati's death in Lower Burma, he was reborn in India where he became a disciple of the Buddha. The fifteenth-century epigraphs do not specify the specific familial connection between Gavampati and the king, but in later Burmese and Mon sources they are always described as brothers, hatched from two snake eggs (more below). The Buddha converted the king and then distributed six hairs to an equal number of hermits in Thaton. No personal names or bits of biography are connected to any of the six recluses in the fifteenth-century inscriptions, unlike the later traditions. The hermits lived in forest hermitages and at least one hilltop, Mt. Kelasa, in the Thaton region (more below).



Fig. 5. Location of key mountaintops and Thaton. Mt. Kelasa is the only peak that can be tied to the fifteenth-century inscriptions with certainty.

Thirty-three Tooth Relics

After the Buddha dispensed the six hair relics to the six hermits in Thaton, the Thaton king then requested a relic from the Buddha for himself. The Buddha demurred but then promised the monarch a tooth relic at the time of his cremation. Based on this promise, the monk Gavampati retrieved a tooth from the funeral pyre and returned to Thaton where it multiplied thirty-three times; the local king, Sirimasoka, then established thirty-three stone pagodas in Thaton for each of the relics. Since most of these inscriptions in Lower Burma accorded equal attention to the hair and tooth relics but are incomplete with lacunae, it is impossible to determine if most of the incised stones commemorated a shrine dedicated to one or the other.

Restoration of Lost Tooth and Hair Relic Stupas by Sona and Uttara

A major theme in all of the fifteenth-century inscriptions is that the stupas dedicated to the hair and tooth relics fell into disuse, disrepair and eventually became lost in vegetation, signaling a withering of the faith. King Asoka therefore dispatched from India Sona and Uttara, two ‘great elders,’ or “*mahatheras*” (Pali), to re-establish Buddhism in Suvannabhumi, 236 years after the Buddha’s demise and at the time of the Third Synod in India. The ruling king in Thaton at this later time was also called Sirimasoka.



Fig. 6. Two hermits ascending to the Kyaik-hti-yo pagoda, distinguished by special tapered hats.

The Thaton king pleaded with Sona and Uttara: “Since your arrival in our land, we have the *Dhamma* Gem and the *Sangha* Gem to worship ... to be happy at heart, the Buddha Gem we would like to worship.... shall our lords [Sona and Uttara] search for us?” (U Chit Thein: 93; Shorto 1971: xxxii, no. 70). The Three

Jewels, or *tiratana* (Pali), were therefore incomplete without bodily relics of the Buddha. It was this plea on the part of the Thaton king that prompted Sona and Uttara to locate and restore the lost pagodas. The same formulaic wording is found in the Shwedagon Inscription where Sona and Uttara discovered the lost ruins of the Shwedagon stupa and then restored it with Sirimasoka (Pe Maung Tin: 19).

Mt. Kelasa: the only known fifteenth-century hair relic pagoda

Lacunae in the inscriptions preclude identification of all of the six spots devoted to stupas containing a hair relic. The only hilltop that can be identified is Mt. Kelasa, a peak situated about thirty miles northwest of Thaton. There were likely other mountains, but these are lost in effaced portions of the stones. Likely candidates are Mt. Zingyaik and Mt. Zwegabin, in light of their sanctity and proximity to Thaton, but there is no certainty. Two hermitages in the Rangoon area were “at the middle of the forest of Randa-naguir ” and the other “at the east of the city of Asitanjana-naguir [Asitanjana, or Rangoon] (Chit Thein: nos. 91-92; Shorto 1971: xxxii, nos. 72-73).¹

Kelasa is also referred to in passing in the Kalyani Inscription, as the “*ceitya* on Mt. Kelasa”, or “Kelasabhappabatacetiya” (Taw Sein Ko 1893: 16). In the Mon version of the Kalyani Inscription, the mountain is called “Kelasapow” (Blagden 1928: 185). There is also a two-part fifteenth-century inscription on Mt. Kelasa, which mentions Kelasapow, thus corroborating the identification of this mountain with one of the stupas connected to one of the six hair relics (Chit Thein: nos. 91-92; Shorto 1971: xxxii, nos. 72-73). This hilltop is the only confirmed original location for one of the six hair relics from the fifteenth century; Mt. Kelasa probably remained associated with one or more hair relics, including to the present. No evidence, however, suggests that Kyaik-hti-yo Hill was one of the six locations in the fifteenth century.

The long ridge on which Mt. Kelasa is located was also the site of two important early Mon epigraphs from the time of the King Kyanzittha (c.1084-c.1113), which recorded restorations of two shrines (Luce 1969-1970: I.56). However, no conclusive evidence indicates that Mt. Kelasa, the peak within this ridge, was itself under worship during this same period. The two inscriptions were found some distance from Mt. Kelasa itself on the ridge and the term Mt. Kelasa does not appear in the two epigraphs. However, Mt. Kelasa is found in Kyanzittha’s Myakan Lake inscription from near Pagan, described as the abode of the hermit-cum-deity, sage Bisnu (“*risi Bisnu*”), the future founder of Sri Kshetra (Duroiselle: 139). The context

¹ Asitanjana, lifted from early Pali sources, appears in a number of fifteenth-century Mon inscriptions where it has been taken to be Rangoon (Pe Maung Tin). Randa cannot be yet identified but was perhaps just north of the Shwedagon, Rangoon, if it can be identified with a reference in a later Mon text, *Slapat Rajawan datow smin ron*.

(Halliday: 86). In this chronicle, the relics for the Shwedagon were said to be bathed at Ranna-naguir, a “hill to the north of Singuttara [Shwedagon Hill] ” (Halliday: 86).

implies that Mt. Kelasa is the famous legendary hill situated in the celestial realm, well known in Buddhist and Hindu literature, and not the hill of the same name in Lower Burma.



Fig. 7. Tissa the Hermit, center, with King of Thaton, left, and Thagyamin. Kyaik-hti-yo.

Location of the Tooth Relic Pagodas

Sona and Uttara also re-discovered the lost and derelict stupas connected to the Thirty Three Tooth Relics that were created in Thaton at the time of the Buddha's visit. These tooth-relic stupas, however, were not restored like the hair-relic stupas in their original locations but the teeth were distributed by Sona and Uttara throughout the realm. The only site which can be positively identified with any of these dispersed tooth relics was the Shwemawdaw Pagoda in Pegu, in the fifteenth century (Thet Tin: 9-22, 54-55; Stadtner, 2007a). Another tooth-relic stupa inscription was found at Thaton itself, likely belonging the Shwezayan Pagoda, but the true location of the pagoda at Thaton is uncertain (Chit Thein: no. 94; Shorto 1971: xxxii, 70).



Fig. 8. Shwemawdaw, Pegu. Its fifteenth-century myth centered on a tooth relic was eclipsed by a hair-relic legend modeled on the Shwedagon. The earlier myth was only uncovered by a chance discovery in the 1950s.

The Shwemawdaw was the paramount stupa in the Mon capital, thus signifying the cardinal importance of this tooth-relic tradition. Indeed, the Shwemawdaw and the Shwedagon were the two most sacred sites in Lower Burma for the Mon in the fifteenth century. Moreover, the distribution of tooth relics by Sona and Uttara in Lower Burma played a key role in the definition of Mon polity, an issue fully explored by H. L. Shorto (1963, 1967).

This fifteenth-century myth connected to the Shwemawdaw in Pegu, centered on a tooth relic, was completely eclipsed at some point following the Mon loss of Lower Burma. It was replaced by a legend based on two brothers from near Pegu who ventured to India and received two hair relics from the Buddha at Rajagaha. They returned home and established the Shwemawdaw, with the help of Thagyamin (Browne). This current myth is modeled on the Shwedagon myth, with a few modifications.

That the earlier Mon myth was essentially erased from the pages of history suggests how even potent myths connected to sacred sites can come and go with astonishing alacrity and often without leaving a trace (Stadtner, 2007a). This is not at all to suggest that they are deliberately suppressed but rather the new myth, or a variation on an old one, becomes so dominant that the former myth(s) is completely concealed beneath new layers. Pagan provides countless examples of this lasting phenomena, but more recent examples are the Sule and the Botataung pagodas in Rangoon, whose earlier myths were largely buried in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively (more below).

This tradition of dispersing the thirty-three teeth was scarcely forgotten however, even though its association with the Shwemawdaw were forgotten. A Burmese Buddhist text from the late eighteenth century recorded that all of teeth were recovered from a single stupa on an unidentified mountain named Inda-danoo, northeast of Thaton, and were distributed throughout Lower Burma, eleven to Hamsavati, eleven to Patheingyi and eleven to Mottama (Bigandet: 391).²

All of the fifteenth-century inscriptions imply that these restored hair relic and tooth relic shrines were patronized by Mon kings in a continuous fashion from the time of Sona and Uttara up to and including the reign of Dhammaceti. A few of the epigraphs refer to refurbishments of stupas in the historical past, with references to earlier Mon kings, such as Banya-U (1369-1384) and Rajadhiraj (1384-1420) (Chit Thein: no. 87; Shorto: 1970, xxxi, no. 66; Thet Tin). In chronological terms, a huge gap between the time of Sona, Uttara, and King Sirimasoka and the fourteenth-century Mon kings in Pegu is understood but unstated.

Six Hair Relics Become Eight

According to the fifteenth-century inscriptions, one of the six recluses returned to his forest retreat where two junior hermits declared: “But two of us got no such object of worship ... the senior hermit replied to the

² The three correspond to the administrative divisions in the fifteenth century referred to in the Kalyani Inscription: Kusimandala (Patheingyi) Hamsavatimandala (Pegu) and Muttimandala (Mottama) (Taw Sein Ko, 1893: 34).

two junior hermits, 'Let us pray and make a vow.' They made a solemn vow, '... let this one hair relic become three for the three of us to worship'. " The senior hermit, the middle hermit and the younger hermit then enshrined their relics in individual stone stupas, presumably in their shared hermitage. These three hermits are always said in the fifteenth-century epigraphs to dwell "at the west of the middle forest," an unidentified location (Chit Thein: no. 88; Shorto, 1971: xxxii, nos. 76-77). In total, eight hair relics were thought to be enshrined in separate stone stupas worshipped by the eight hermits, based on the fifteenth-century epigraphs.



Fig. 9. King Okkalapa miraculously restored four hair relics stolen from Tapussa and Bhallika en route from India. Eight hairs eventually were placed in the Shwedagon. Botataung Pagoda. By U Ba Kyi (1912-2000).

This 'sub-story' devoted to the replication of one hair was perhaps devised in order to match the same number of hair relics given to Tapussa and Bhallika by the Buddha in India, or was added to account for eight important pre-Dhammaceti-period hair-relic pagodas that needed to be incorporated into the legend. Or this incident of the replication may have been added simply to enhance the potency of the hair relics and the spiritual prowess of the hermits, much like King Okkalapa who famously restored four stolen hair relics that belonged to the original eight intended for the Shwedagon. That this replication is mentioned in all of the inscriptions touching on the hair relics (and tooth-relics) suggest its importance, but there is no reason to associate this episode in any way to Kyaik-hti-yo in the fifteenth century.



Fig. 10. Sacred tooth concealed in the headdress of princess Hemamala, fleeing from Kalinga to Sri Lanka, disguised as a hermit. Kelaniya Vihara. Near Colombo. Mural, Solias Mendiz, c. 1936–1946.

Sources for the Six Hair Relic Legend

The sources for the ‘six hair relics’ legend are obscure, unlike the Shwedagon myth whose roots can be traced fairly easily in the Pali canon and its commentaries (Pe Maung Tin). One undated Pali text, the *Chronicle of the Six Hair Relics*, or the *Chakesadhatuvamsa*, has few similarities with traditions in Lower Burma, apart from the same number of hairs that the Buddha proffered, in this case to disciples in Rajagaha (Strong 2004: 82-85). This text of uncertain date was probably composed in Sri Lanka and appears to have exerted no impact in Burma.

One possible source for the Mon tradition was the *Mahavamsa*, the ancient Sinhalese Pali chronicle, where the Buddha gave an unspecified number of hairs to an important local deity named Mahasumana who resided on Samanakuta, or Adam’s Peak. This occurred on the Buddha’s first visit to the island (Geiger: 5). This episode may have provided an indirect impetus for the Thaton legend, but glaring dissimilarities make it an unlikely source.

Similar legends from neighboring Thailand approximate numerous elements in many of the legends in Lower Burma, but none closely resemble the ‘six hair relics’ episode. One myth with some parallels involves a

single hair relic presented by the Buddha to a newly converted family of ogres whose son, Wasuthep, enshrined it on the famous Doi Suthep, the towering peak on the northern outskirts of Chiang Mai named Doi Suthep (Swearer, Sommai 1998; Swearer, Sommai, Phaithoon 2004: 72).³

On balance, the tradition of the six hair relics (the Buddha granting six strands to six hermits outside of India) probably arose *sui generis* in Burma during the fifteenth century, if not before. The theme of the Buddha's gift of hair relics to hermits survived in Lower Burma and gave rise to numerous separate traditions following the Mon defeat in the sixteenth century. New sets of hermits were created and the circumstances altered, but the basic narrative of the Buddha's visit to Thaton and meeting hermits remained constant. Whether all or only a portion of the many myths recorded in Dhammaceti's inscriptions emerged during his reign or if they were developed much earlier is difficult to say. Common sense would argue that these myths had already matured over a long period in Lower Burma before the reign of Dhammaceti, but no hard proof has survived (Stadtner 1990; 1991).



Fig. 11. The hermit Wasuthep, center, enshrined a hair relic, obtained from the Buddha, on Doi Suthep, the sacred peak just north of Chiang Mai. Wasuthep began life as an ogre, converted, and became a monk before becoming a recluse. Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai

³ This hair relic has been overshadowed by another relic at Doi Suthep, a bodily relic brought from Sukothai; another single hair relic, given by the Buddha to a king in Thailand multiplied itself eight times (Swearer, Sommai, & Phaithoon 2004: 53, 71-72).

Family Matters: the *Gavampati* chronicle, c. 1710

The King of Thaton and Gavampati are described in the fifteenth-century inscriptions as merely kinsmen in a past life, but their biographies were embellished following the Mon defeat in Lower Burma in the sixteenth century.⁴ The two fullest and probably earliest sources treating their relationship are two Mon texts, a Thaton chronicle named *Uppanna Sudhammavati-rajavamsakatha*, the *Story of the Royal Family of Sudhammavati* [Thaton] and a text entitled *Gavampati*, attributed by Shorto to c. 1710 (Shorto 1970). Since the latter text can perhaps be dated to the beginning of the eighteenth century, then its contents were likely current during the seventeenth century, if not before.

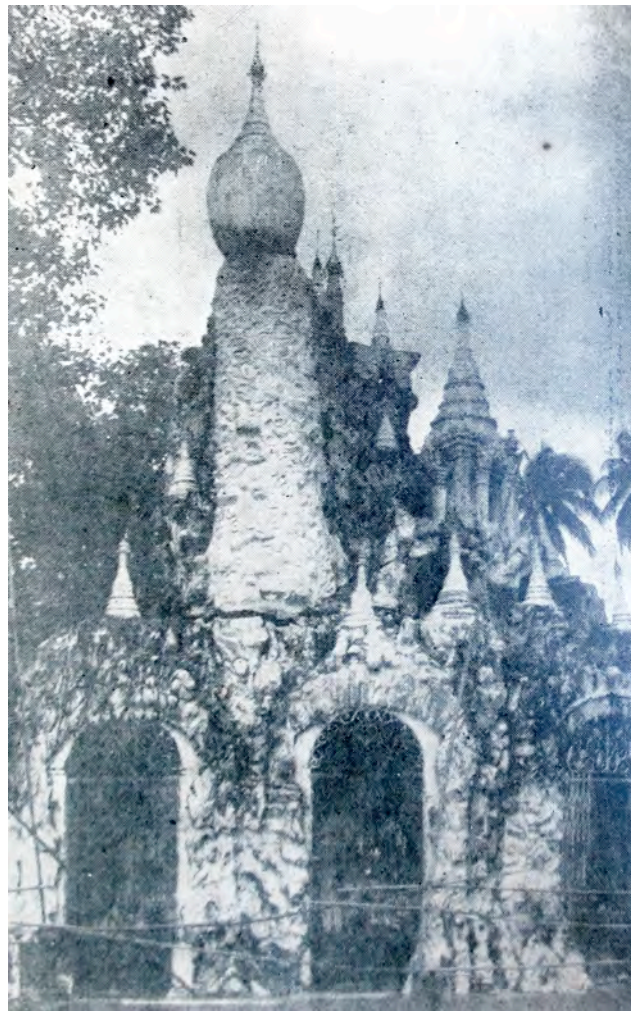


Fig. 12. The Shwedagon and the Golden Rock were closely linked even in the late nineteenth century. This replica on the Shwedagon platform came down probably in the 1950s or 1960s (after Aung Than, fig. 7).

The story in these early Mon texts begins with two princes who renounced their father's court in Thaton for forest hermitages on separate mountaintops. The elder prince, sometimes called Siha, settled on Mt. Zingyaik, a towering peak eighteen miles south of Thaton. Here he discovered on its northern slope two eggs left by a snake-goddess who had mated with a wizard (Mon: *wijadhuin*; from Pali: *vijjadhara*) (Shorto 1970:19). The eggs were abandoned when the wizard discovered that his consort, a lovely woman disguised as a snake, had produced not children but eggs. The wizard ran off in fright and disgust, while his serpentine partner then disappeared into the earth, forsaking her two eggs on Mt. Zingyaik.

From the eggs in possession of the elder hermit on Mt. Zingyaik hatched two sons. The elder hermit raised the elder child, Suriyakumara, who became King of Thaton (also called Siha-raja in many sources). The younger child, named Candakumara, was presented to the hermit's brother who inhabited a sacred hill eight miles south of Pa'an in neighboring Karen State called Mt. Zwegabin, or the Duke of York's Nose in colonial times (Shorto 1967:134).

Candakumara died at the age of six and was reborn in India where he became Gavampati, a disciple of the Buddha. Meanwhile, his brother, in a later rebirth, assumed the throne in Thaton. It was this Thaton king who was converted by the Buddha after coming to his court at the request of his brother, Gavampati.

These two Mon chronicles add that Gavampati returned from India to Suvannabhumi to search for his mother from a previous life who was then living in a village close to Thaton and near Mt. Zingyaik; Gavampati's mother had been reborn there as a seven-year old girl. To convince the populace of their former familial descent, Gavampati caused milk to spring from the child's breasts into his mouth (Shorto 1970: 18-21).

These two Mon chronicles are in general agreement about the parentage and biographies of Gavampati and his older brother, the Thaton king. The two hills near Thaton, Zingyaik and Zwegabin, were therefore homes to the brother-hermits and their two adopted sons hatched from eggs (Gavampati and the King of Thaton). These two sacred hills later come to play an important role in the current Kyaik-ht-iyō legend, but no firm evidence proves that these two hills were venerated in the fifteenth century.⁵

This basic story, that was probably current sometime in the seventeenth century, survived in lore and in Buddhist chronicles. For example, it is repeated in the late eighteenth-century *Vamsadīpani*, and in the nineteenth-century *Sasanavamsa*, with minor variations (Pranke: 130-131; Law: 40-41).

⁵ A monk on Mt. Zingyaik is said to have composed the Mon text, *Nidana Arambhakatha*. If Shorto's dating of this text, sometime after 1538 but before 1661, is correct, then it would suggest the early importance of Mt. Zingyaik. This text has nothing on the transmission of Buddhism or the hair relics in Thaton (Shorto 1961: 64).

The Hair Relics: the *Gavampati* chronicle, c. 1710

In this aforementioned *Gavampati* chronicle, attributed by Shorto to c. 1710, there appears a key early reference to Kyaik-hti-yo Hill. The chronicle described three sets of hermits who received hair relics in Thaton from the Buddha and then returned home to their hermitages and enshrined their relics. The names of the hermits in the first two sets are not mentioned but are included in the last set. Most of the locations cannot yet be identified. These three groups of hermits represent separate but related traditions that were brought together in a unified narrative in this text, suggesting how the legend had already altered by the seventeenth century. Its fifteenth-century core remained the same, that is, hermits receiving hair relics in Thaton and returning to their hermitages and establishing stupas, but the hermits had multiplied and Kyaik-hti-yo was now included.



Fig. 13. The Buddha presented eight hair relics to Tapussa and Bhallika, two merchant brothers from Asitanjana, or Rangoon, enshrined in the Shwedagon.

Three Groups of Hermits (based on the *Gavampati* chronicle, c. 1710)

First Group – Three hermits

The first group of hermits that received single hair relics from the Buddha at Thaton numbered three. One enshrined his relic in the “Celasa Shrine”, probably Mt. Kelasa, the peak near Thaton and also the site of a hair relic in the fifteenth-century inscriptions. Another deposited his treasure in the Hair Relic Shrine Tamniut, located in Lagun, an old Mon word for modern Rangoon. This stupa cannot be identified today in Rangoon. The third enshrined his relic in a shrine at Muh Kruk (Mon, meaning ‘Mango Edge’), also an unidentified location. Since this group of hermits met the Buddha first, this may imply that that this group outranked the other two. Moreover, two of the identified locations, Lagun, or Rangoon and Mt. Kelasa, were clearly important during the period when the *Gavampati* text was compiled.

Second Group – Three hermits

The second group holds the key for tracing the Kyaik-hti-yo legend:

Then a group of three other hermits came to the Omniscient One [following the first group] and after listening to his sermon asked for objects of worship [at Thaton] ... One of the hermits came and went back and enshrined one hair relic on Jayabhummi Hill, north of Jray Bhum [Jayabhum].⁶ The place is called Mahaceti Kesa Shrine [Kesa, or hair, Pali]. One of the hermits was called Siridamayakkha. He went back to enshrine one of the hair relics on the hill called Tambajayya. This hermit had two younger brothers, one of whom was called Sirimuni, the other one called Siribhavan. The younger brothers also wanted to enshrine [a hair relic]. The three of them concentrated their spiritual strength and they got three hair relics which they could enshrine. One was called Siridama Hair Relic Shrine [in Mon, Siri Dama Sok, which was Siri Dhamma Sok, or Siridhammasoka, another name for king of Thaton]. One was called Siri Muni Shrine, and one was called Siri Bhavan Shrine. All three shrines are still there to be seen. *One of the hermits carried the hair relic which he received on his head and took it back to enshrine on a big hill called Kutapabbata. Because the hermit carried the hair relic on his head, the place was called ‘Shrine of the [relic] which the hermit carried on his head’ (“kyaik-isi-yiun”, Mon) [kyaik (shrine), isi (hermit), yiun (carried on head), Mon; or Kyaik Hti Yo, Burmese]*” (italics mine).

⁶ Jray Bhum is Jayabhummi or ‘Place of Victory’ (Mathias Jenny, personal communication, August, 2008). Perhaps Jayabhummi was considered Thaton and the Maha Kesa Shrine might be the one on Mt. Kelasa. The Kelasa range is northwest of Thaton.

Only the Kyaitk-hti-yo location can be identified with much certainty from this list above. The replication of the single hair relic into two echoes the version cited in many of the Dhammaceti inscriptions from the fifteenth century, but here the three hermits are described as brothers. Although only Kyaik-hti-yo Hill can be identified in this list, it is possible that this list featured only sites in the Thaton-Bilin area. The name *Kutapabbata* (Pali), or literally Mountain Peak, probably served as a formal term for Kyaik-hti-yo, a common device associating important local spots with Pali terms.

Third Group – Six Hermits

A third and final group approached the Buddha for hair relics during his visit to Thaton, following the second group's audience with the Buddha. This group numbered six hermits and each was listed with his name and the location of his hermitage. Most of the six locations cannot be yet identified. One is said to be hermit Bhagiyya on Kutapabbata Hill, which is likely the Kyaik-hti-yo Hill (see above). Other locations are Payiuw Gnin Hill near Motttama and a site situated between Moulmein and Thanbyuzayat. And one hermit named Lomamajihma enshrined his relic on Singhuttara Trihakumbha Hill in Lagun (the 'Shwedagon Hill,' Rangoon). The geographical range in this list is therefore extensive, from Rangoon to the Moulmein area, from urban shrines to remote Kyaik-hti-yo, or Kutapabbata.



Fig. 14. Lore asserts that the boulder never really rests on the cliff side but hovers just above. It was once thought to be much higher, brought down by the present “degenerate days” (Forbes 1878: 206).

Ù Kalà and King Pyei

An important early historical reference to Kyaik-hti-yo appears in Ù Kalà's *Great Chronicle* (*Maha-ya-zawin-gyi*) compiled in c. 1729. In a section detailing the benefactions of King Pyei (1661-1672) is the following: "He also donated *makutas* to the Shwemawdaw Pagoda [in Pegu], the Itharo Pagoda [Kyaik-hti-yo] and the Pyinnat Pagoda [in Mottama]."⁷

The *makutas* (Pali), or crowns or crests, should likely be interpreted as spires, or *htis*. These donations were perhaps made at the time of the king's victorious campaign in the Mottama area in 1662-1663 against invading forces from Ayutthaya. The etymology of 'Itharo' in Kalà's text reflects a Burmese corruption of the Mon *is̃i*, or 'hermit' (from the Sanskrit *ṛṣi*), combined with *ivo*, or 'a load carried on the head.' This connection with a relic 'carried on the head' is also a distinguishing feature of the Mon version recorded in the *Gavampati* chronicle during approximately the same period (see above). Even if this reference to this seventeenth-century king's donation at Itharo (Kyaik-hti-yo) is erroneous, it nevertheless provides strong evidence that Kyaik-hti-yo was well known by Kalà's day, even in Upper Burma.

It is also probably safe to assume that it was the huge granite boulder at Kyaik-hti-yo that was the object of devotion at Kyaik-hti-yo in the seventeenth century; but there is no absolute certainty. Unfortunately, Kalà associated no specific myth or relic with Itharo, but it was surely the site of an important shrine, almost certainly associated with a hair relic, said to be carried on the head of a hermit.



Fig. 15. Shwedagon Inscription. Mon, Burmese and Pali text, reign of Dhammaceti (r. 1470-1492). Six hairs were enshrined, the derelict pagoda was 'discovered' and restored by Sona and Uttara, a role later played by Sule Nat, King Okkalapa and Thagyamin. Stones originally found on the east slope, by Forchhammer.

⁷ This translation and discussion of the etymology was provided by U Tun Aung Chain (personal communication, October, 2008). This passage is also translated in Than Htut (2000: 83).

Mt. Zingyaik and Mt. Zwegabin: sixteenth – seventeenth century Burmese Poems

Two Burmese poets following the Mon defeat in the first half of the sixteenth century have described two sacred peaks south of Kyaik-hti-yo and Thaton. This information puts many of the mythic elements surrounding Gavampati and the King of Thaton in sharper historical perspective.

The earlier poet is the famous Nawaday-gyi, from Hamsavati, who included a description of Mt. Zingyaik in three of his works. The poems mention a pagoda on Mt. Zingyaik named Kyaik Brannat, or ‘Pagoda of the Female Naga’ (Kyaik Grannat, Mon). The name of the pagoda incorporated *kyaik*, the well-known Mon word for pagoda, or stupa, and *brannat*, or female *naga*. Moreover, the hill was also spoken of as the location of a hair-relic pagoda. Another of his poems dealt with nearby Mt. Zwegabin, near Pa-an, southeast of Thaton, another sacred hill that belonging to the later modern Kyaik-hti-yo legend.

The later poet, who accompanied Anauk-hpet-lun (r. 1606-1628) in his military campaign to Mottama (Martaban), also mentioned the same pagoda at Mt. Zingyaik (“*Brannat-hpaya*”) and referred to it as containing a hair relic.⁸ Although there is no indication in Dhammaceti’s fifteenth-century inscriptions that Zingyaik or Zwegabin were among the locations tied to the six hair relics, it is certainly very possible that these two peaks were included among the six sacred spots, in light of their veneration from an early period.

Significantly, Kyaik-hti-yo is absent in the works of these two early Burmese poets, perhaps suggesting that the site came to be widely worshipped only during the second half of the seventeenth century, corresponding to the reign of King Pyei in which there is the first recorded donation at Itharo (Kyaik-hti-yo). In any case, these poems and the references to King Pyei’s donations suggest the degree to which Burmese kings were patronizing sites throughout the former Mon area.⁹

The two mountains, Zingyaik and Zwegabin, were probably accessible on the trade routes to Mottama and easily visible, whereas Kyaik-hti-yo lay in an isolated mountainous area. Its remoteness somewhat resembles the Shwesettaw pilgrimage site, near Minbu, which also received royal patronage in the seventeenth century.

⁸ Information on these two poets is drawn from a forthcoming work by U San Win that was kindly supplied to me by Elizabeth Moore (San Win).

⁹ As Lieberman observed, “Taung-ngu kings sought to advertise their piety in ecumenical fashion by consulting a mixture of Burmese, Mon and Shan on ceremonial occasions” (Lieberman 1978: 461).



Fig. 16. South entrance, Shwedagon. Souvenir glass-painting, c. 1905. Private collection, Rangoon.

Unnamed Mon Chronicle, 1784

Additional important information on Kyaik-hti-yo is preserved in an unnamed Mon chronicle translated into Burmese in 1784 during the reign of Bowdawpaya (1792-1819).¹⁰ It adheres to the basic narrative of the Buddha coming to Thaton and distributing six hair relics to six hermits but includes ‘new’ hills that were not included in the aforementioned Mon texts.

¹⁰ I wish to thank Elizabeth Moore for providing me U San Win’s translation of this text (personal communication, August, 2008).

This grouping is important for the modern Kyaik-hti-yo legend, since the names of some of the hermits and hills are included in the current myth (see table).

Hermits and Hills in the Current Kyak-hti-yo Myth	
Hermit	Hill or “Mountain”
Tila	Kelasa
Buddanana	Kyaik-hti-yo
Tissa	Zingyaik
Siha	Zwegabin
Dibbacakkubaya	Kusinara
Meilon	Meilon
Note that both Kusinara and Meilon are located in Bilin Township, close to Kyaik-hti-yo.	

It was this tradition that was partially tapped for the modern Kyaik-hti-yo myth, but with significant modifications.

Kyaik-hti-yo in National Chronicles

Despite the local interest given to these related hair-relic pagodas in Lower Burma, the six hair relics and thirty-three tooth relics were accorded scant attention in major historical and religious chronicles, such as the *Glass Palace Chronicle* (*Hman-nàn maha-ya-zawin-daw-gyí*). Such neglect was partly because these broader national chronicles highlighted the Buddha’s introduction of Buddhism to Burma through his visit to the Sandalwood Monastery, the Shwesettaw and the Hpo-U Hill and his predictions about Sri Kshetra and King Dattabaung. Tribute was also paid to Anawrahta’s capture of the Pali canon at Thaton and the establishment of the faith at Pagan and so on. The six hair relics and thirty-three tooth relics of Suvannabhumi appear in these descriptions but are referred to only in passing, as afterthoughts. For example, Gavampati, his brother King Siharaja of Thaton, and the Buddha’s visit to Thaton are introduced in the *Glass Palace Chronicle*, but only as background to King Manuha who is captured by Anawrahta; there is no reference to hermits or hair relics and only the briefest reference to the thirty-three tooth relics (Pe Maung Tin & Luce: 79).¹¹ The *Vamsadipani*, a late eighteenth-century Buddhist chronicle, followed much the same outline and also omitted any reference to hair relics and hermits (Pranke: 130-131). Only the nineteenth-century Pali *Sasanavamsa* mentions the six hair relics, but it only does so in passing and does not provide either the names of the hermits or their mountaintops (Law: 42).¹²

¹¹ The number of teeth are said to be thirty-two and not thirty-three.

¹² The earlier *Thathanalinkara Sadan* (1831) essentially repeats the information recorded in the Pali *Sasanavamsa*. I wish to thank Patrick Pranke for providing me a translation of this passage (personal communication, August, 2008).



Fig. 17. Golden Rock hovering above cliff side reflects persistent lore. Souvenir glass-painting, c. 1905. Private collection, Rangoon

The First Half of the Nineteenth Century

Few specific notices of Kyaik-hti-yo appear after the late eighteenth-century Mon chronicle (see above). This long hiatus only ends again when a Mon monk named Thwarn-phyu Hsayadaw resided on Kyaik-hti-yo Hill in the 1820s. Selecting Kyaik-hti-yo as his base was scarcely accidental, suggesting a continued importance of the site.¹³

¹³ This information about the Thwarn-phyu *hsayadaw* is taken from a booklet about Kusunara that draws upon sources I have been unable to check independently (Cetana: 1997b: 13).

This same *hsayadaw* was also influential in ‘discovering’ and restoring a spot near Kyaik-hit-yo, on Mt. Kusinara. It is located only eight miles from Bilin and therefore closer to the main route leading south to Thaton and Mottama and therefore less remote than Kyaik-hti-yo. Kusinara was included in the Mon manuscript of 1784 discussed above.

For Mt. Kusinara the Thwam-phyu *Hsayadaw* had a dream in 1828 in which a white monkey, a turtle and a snake appeared to indicate the location of a boulder that contained a hair relic. This rock, after it “emitted Buddha’s rays,” was cleared of jungle and then restored. At the same time the monk ‘discovered’ two stone statues of Sona and Uttara who were thought to have died on this spot (Cetana 1997b: 13).

The site was called Kusinara, since it marked the location where Sona and Uttara are said to have died, modeled after Kusinara where the Buddha’s death occurred in India. Classical Pali literature says nothing about the death of Sona and Uttara in Suvannabhumi, and their demise on this mountain appears to be an indigenous addition by the early nineteenth century. It is unlikely that this hill was the site of a hair relic in the fifteenth century. The hill may have been among those mentioned in the *Gavampati* chronicle, c. 1710, but known by a different name. It was restored by the government in the 1990s but is greatly overshadowed by Kyaik-hti-yo.

That Kusinara may have enjoyed regional popularity is perhaps suggested by a reference in a Thai chronicle compiled during this same period in the early nineteenth century. In this text, focused on the famous Mt. Suthep (Doi Suthep) outside of Chiang Mai, the Buddha is said to have journeyed within northern Thailand and then to Rangoon (Takong) and thereupon to Kusinara. The context of the passage, long before the Buddha’s old age, implies that it was Kusinara in Lower Burma rather than Kusinara in India (Swearer, Sommai, Phaithoon: 39, 43). If this identification in the Thai chronicle is correct, then it illustrates that Kusinara enjoyed a regional reputation in the first part of the nineteenth century and that it was more well known at that time than Kyaik-hti-yo.



Figure 18. Kyaik-hti-yo had entered the national pantheon of key sacred sites by the early 1880s, with the Shwedagon and the Mahamuni (after Temple: pl. XVIII).

Whatever the role of this *hsayadam* living at Kyaik-hti-yo in the first half of the nineteenth century, it is clear by the end of the century that Kyaik-hti-yo had firmly entered the pantheon of national sacred sites. Its popularity probably began in earnest in the 1870s and accelerated greatly in the next decade.



Fig. 19. *Zawgyi* and his disguised *naga*-consort may be the figures in the lower right. Mahamuni Temple, Mandalay, c. 1892. Murals, south corridor.

Kyaik-hti-yo & Taw Sein Ko, 1891

The trail of evidence picks up again at the time of Taw Sein Ko's tour of old 'Ramannadesa' in the cold season of 1891, which appeared in his report issued the following year in the *Indian Antiquary*. By his visit in 1891 the Golden Rock had long since become a national pilgrimage site, evinced by its prominent appearance among the murals at the Mahamuni Temple in Mandalay from about 1892 and descriptions in the 1880s (Forbes: 270 – 275). Taw Sein Ko first visited Mt. Kusinara where he noted the same two stone images of

Sona and Uttara that the *hsayadan* had discovered in the 1820s; these can still be seen today. He also noted a stone vessel “reputed to contain a hair of Gautama Buddha” (Taw Sein Ko 1892: 381).¹⁴ After visiting Mt. Kusinara he moved on and inspected Mt. Kyaik-hti-yo and Mt. Kelasa, the two other famous locations for hair relics at the time in the region.

Taw Sein Ko recorded that the hair relics were only associated with three hill tops, Kusinara, Kelasa and Kyaik-hti-yo, and three individual hermits (Taw Sein Ko 1892: 382). These three hilltops were among the six that appeared in the aforementioned Mon text of 1784; the remaining three hills mentioned in the Mon text were dropped by Taw Sein Ko’s visit.

The three hermits on these three hills had no personal connection or contact with each other, according to Taw Sein Ko.¹⁵ In a different part of the report Taw Sein Ko also observed that the foster-father of the Thaton king was thought to be a hermit on Mt. Zingyaik; he had no connection with the hermits on the other three hills and was not associated with a hair relic. This entire configuration was to change soon after his visit.



Fig. 20. Two brothers returning from India with two hair relics, for enshrinement in the Shwemawdaw, a myth modeled on the Shwedagon legend. Shwemawdaw platform. By Aung Hlaing Oo.

¹⁴ The peak in Taw Sein Ko’s day was also called Kokthennayon (Taw Sein Ko 1892: 381-382). In some of the later Mon texts it is sometimes named Siripabbata, or Great Mountain.

¹⁵ A single hair within the rock was reported by Shwe Yoe in the first (1895) and second (1895) editions of *The Burman*. The same information passed into the last edition (1909) but by then the number of hairs had changed to reflect the altered myth (Shwe Yoe: 168). By the late 1890s observers noted that the rock contained two hairs, more in keeping with the modern story that was probably evolving at that time (Ferrars: 190).

The Kyaik-hti-yo Legend Today

Sometime following Taw Sein Ko's visit in 1891, the myth underwent a fundamental shift that brilliantly tied together three key hermits, the most sacred mountaintops in the region and the king of Thaton (see below). This new version became the 'standard myth' current today but the exact circumstances surrounding its formulation are as yet unknown. It probably emerged at the turn of the century when increasing numbers of pilgrims visited the Golden Rock. It was probably the increased number of pilgrims and donations that led to the creation of a Pagoda Board of Trustees in 1903. Around this time there was likely a need to codify the myth in a new local chronicle, or *thamaing*. Whether the structuring of the modern myth was devised self-consciously by a single individual or even by a group cannot yet be determined. Or perhaps the formulation reflected commonly held ideas in the region of which Taw Sein Ko was unaware. A single surviving *thamaing* from the early twentieth century would certainly fill in much of this missing information.

A hunch is that an influential monk at the turn of the century wove together various mythic threads in the region touching on the hair relics, sacred peaks and the story of the King of Thaton and his foster-father living on Mt. Zingyaik. The degree to which the modern myth differs from Taw Sein Ko's rendition of 1891 suggests the great extent to which the legend was embellished.

The Twentieth-century Reconfiguration

The most common modern version of the Kyaik-hti-yo myth begins with the Buddha coming to Thaton, at the request of Gavampati, and converting the king. The Buddha divided six hair relics equally among three hermits who had collected in Thaton, unlike the fifteenth-century traditions that spoke of six hermits (Aung Than: 25-26; Moore 2004: 155). Then follows a brilliant reassignment of hermits and mountains to elevate the importance of Kyaik-hti-yo and to pull in the King of Thaton. This version tied together in a single stroke the Thaton royal family, the hair relics, the most sacred local peaks and Mt. Kyaik-hti-yo.

One hermit resided on Mt. Kyaik-hti-yo, while the others on Mt. Zingyaik and Mt. Kelasa, the three most sacred peaks in the entire region. The Buddha bestowed two hairs to each of the hermits who returned to their hermitages.

The Kyaik-hti-yo hermit, named Tissa, becomes none other than the foster-father of the king of Thaton. This was accomplished by shifting 'Tissa The Hermit' from Mt. Zingyaik, where he was known to be in the Mon chronicle cited above, to Kyaik-hti-yo. This brings in this key hermit with familial ties to the King of Thaton. Tissa, the Hermit of Kyaik-hit-yo, did not enshrine his two hair relics within a stupa, but retained both in his topknot.

In this modern rendition, Tissa's younger brother hermit has been shifted from Mt. Zwegabin to Mt. Zingyaik; his home was Mt. Zwegabin in the Mon chronicle cited above. He enshrined one hair on Mt. Zingyaik and the other on Mt. Zwegabin, thus underscoring the sacred status of these two revered

mountains. The third hermit, often named Tila, lived on Mt. Kelasa where he interred one of the hairs in a stupa but kept one for private worship. Tila's association with Kelasa also the same in the earlier Mon chronicle. When the Mt. Kelasa hermit passed away, then Tissa from Kyaik-hti-yo obtained the relic that was never enshrined; this current version allowed Mt. Kelasa to retain its sanctity, since it remained in possession of one sacred hair.

The hermit Tissa now carried three relics within his topknot, and then resumed his life as a recluse on Kyaik-hti-yo Hill. As Tissa's death approached, the king in Thaton (his adopted son) and Thagyamin begged the hermit to give up his three relics for enshrinement. Tissa would only relent if Thagyamin was able to locate a stone repository resembling the shape of the hermit's head.¹⁶

These important changes not only put the Kyaik-hti-yo hermit in the epicenter of the myth but also connected him to his son, the Thaton king, the first patron of the Golden Rock. It also created for the first time the family drama between the dying Kyaik-hti-yo hermit and his son who had convinced his father to relinquish his three hair relics for the common good. At the same time, it elevated and linked together three nearby sacred mountains, Kelasa, Zingyaik and Zwebagin. It is a tightly structured myth that draws in all of the principal protagonists, the major relics, important local sacred hills and the King of Thaton, the royal patron.

The modern myth concludes with Thagyamin flying through the air and locating a boulder, sometimes said to be at the bottom of the ocean, which resembled the shape of the hermit's head. Today at Kyaik-hti-yo a large boulder, with a flat top crowned by a pagoda, is taken to be the barge on which the Golden Rock came to Kyaik-hti-yo. This flat rock is located along the track leading to the summit and is called Kyauk-thampan.

With his magic dagger, Thagyamin then bore a hole at the top of the rock into which the three relics were placed. As the work finished, the hermit Tissa died peacefully, gazing at the rock, which was thought to have levitated high above the cliff side.

¹⁶ Placing relics in a top-knot or headdress is reminiscent of Dona, the brahmin, who in some stories absconded with one or more relics at the time of the cremation of the Buddha in his turban (Strong 2004: 120-121). It also recalls the famous story Hemamala, the Kalinga princess, who hid the famous tooth-relic within her headdress while en route to Sri Lanka, disguised as a hermit.

Different Versions Today

One recent official government source maintained that the Buddha dispensed two hairs to each of six hermits, for a total of twelve relics. The Kyaik-hti-yo hermit placed his two relics in the Golden Rock, together with one relic belonging to a hermit from Mt. Kelasa, for a total of three (*New Light of Myanmar*, 20 March 2001). Yet another official version claimed that the Kyaik-hti-yo hermit deposited only a single hair in the rock; this is recorded on a metal plaque near the causeway leading to the rock, dated 19 March 2001, the day the most recent *hti* was raised. That even the number of relics enshrined inside the rock can differ in two state-sponsored versions issued during the same week in 2001 suggests the fluidity of the myth.¹⁷ Indeed, pilgrims often tell very different stories about the relics, but all agree that one or more hair relics are deposited in the rock. The details are irrelevant for worshippers.

The Pagoda Platform and Lore

Life-size modern tableaux on the huge concourse spreading out beside the balancing rock bring to life episodes from the drama. One shows the Kyaik-hti-yo hermit, with his tall tapered leather hermit-hat, collapsing from joy while gazing at the rock, held by a minister with the Thaton king nearby.

One old tradition surrounding Kyaikh-hti-yo is a belief that the rock once levitated, due to its relics. Old depictions of the boulder show it hovering above the cliff side. There was also an opinion, recorded in the late nineteenth century, that the rock descended closer to the “table rock” because of the current “degenerate days”, and that it was now “only possible to pass a hair between the two” (Forbes 1878: 207). Many pilgrims today maintain that a string can be passed between the rock and its shelf.

¹⁷ In the account issued by the Trustees in 1997 there is some confusion if there is one hair or three hairs contained within the boulder (Moore 2004: 163).

Shwe Nan Kyin: From an Egg to a Queen



Fig. 21. The King of Thaton and his queen, Shwe Nan Kyin. She plays a minor role in the narrative but is a major focus of worship today. Kyaik-hti-yo.



**Fig. 22. Shwe Nan Kyin, amidst her family and court. Pavilion dedicated in 2001 by Sect. I.
Khin Nyunt. Kyaik-hti-yo.**

Kyaik-hti-yo Hill is now inextricably linked to the fate of Shwe Nan Kyin, a legendary queen wed to the King of Thaton. A reference to her and the Golden Rock appeared in the early 1920s, but her unhappy fate probably became attached to the rock sometime during the preceding century, if not earlier (Enriquez: 60). She plays a minor role in the basic narrative, solely as a wife to the king, but her presence at Kyaik-hti-yo is everywhere. Her main centers of worship are two large pavilions located on opposite sides of the walkway approaching the rock, just steps below the wide main platform. The hall on the right was renovated at the same time the new pagoda crowning the rock received its *hti*, in March 2001. The hall's donative inscription pays tribute to Khin Nyunt and an influential monk in the region named the Kyaikhtisaung *Hsayadam*.

Life-size models inside depict the goddess and her extended family, including Tissa The Hermit and a standing Buddha figure shown bestowing a hair relic. The opposite pavilion, though much smaller, is more popular, and features the deceased queen, recumbent on the floor and surrounded by family members. Pilgrims make donations and massage with both hands the recumbent sculpture of Shwe Nan Kyin. Such displays were in existence by the 1920s and probably were in evidence in the nineteenth century (Enriquez: 60). On the platform itself are large tableaux depicting her and the king set in faux court scenes. She is also

shown with her husband in a series of large modern sculptures near the top of the hill, next to Tissa, Thagyamin and Bo Bo Aung.

Despite Shwe Nan Kyin's importance at Kyaik-hti-yo, she finds no mention in the standard local histories or chronicles. Her tragic story is best appreciated in a series of painted panels and miniature sculptures on the west side of the Shwedagon platform inside Daw Pwint's pavilion. These panels, repainted many times, were likely in existence by the 1930s, if not before (Aung Than: fig. 28).



Fig. 23. The snake-goddess prepares her lotus bed for the *zawgyi*, left. *Zawgyi* tussles with her after discovering she is a snake in disguise. Daw Pwint's Pavilion., Shwedagon, c. 1930s. Recently refreshed.



Fig. 24. One egg hatches to become Shwe Nan Kyin, later raised by a Karen couple. Daw Pwint's pavilion. Shwedagon . c. 1930s. Recently refreshed.

Her story also opens with a wizard who coupled with a woman disguised as a snake-goddess. This match up resulted in two daughters, not sons. The eggs were also abandoned once the wizard realized that his charming consort was in reality a serpent in disguise. The sisters were raised by separate hermits, thus echoing the biographies of Gavampati and the Thaton king. The hermits gave the youngsters not to hermits to raise, but instead to two Karen couples; Shwe Nan Kyin went to a simple couple in the countryside and her sister to a Karen leader. Shwe Nan Kyin and her family are shown always in traditional Karen attire at Kyaik-hti-yo. Both daughters were eventually betrothed to the ruler of Thaton who became enamored after spotting them on a pilgrimage to Kyaik-hti-yo. The role of female *nagas*, their offspring and their connections to royalty in Burma is treated briefly in a recent study (Brac de la Perriere).



Fig. 25. Disgruntled Karen failing to topple the Golden Rock, turned into monkeys in some stories. Daw Pwint's Pavilion, Shwedagon, c. 1930s. Recently refreshed.

There are many different versions of Shwe Nan Kyin's fate after her marriage, but each ends in tragedy. In one variant Shwe Nan Kyin was unhappy at court and the king therefore sent her home. A tiger attacked her travel party and she died attempting to outrun the beast. The specter of tigers in this very area was real, since a "tiger pulled one of our men out of the shed, though the fellow let out such an unearthly yell that the poor tiger dropped him and fled [in the 1920s]" (Enriquez: 59). The father of the slain Karen queen, furious with the king for sending his daughter home, gathered the local Karen and attempted to pull the Golden Rock off its ledge, with ropes. Not only did the rock refuse to budge, but the villagers also turned into monkeys (Enriquez: 60). Other stories claim that the Karen turned against the Golden Rock after so many Burmese pilgrims came to the region and inadvertently trampled their crops, a version among the Shwedagon painted panels and described in its caption.



Fig. 26. Shwe Nan Kyin, second from right, with her Karen family. Kyaik-hti-yo.



Fig. 27. Tissa the Hermit, amidst the family and court of Shwe Nan Kyin. Shwe Nan Kyin's Pavilion, dedicated in 2001. Kyaik-hti-yo.



Fig. 28. Shwe Nan Kyin worshipped by pilgrims. Her death is usually associated with a tiger. Such tableaux were at Kyaik-hti-yo at least as early as the 1920s.

Other stories claim that Shwe Nan Kyin was happy at court but failed to heed her family's wishes to return home to make offerings to a mountain-deity, or *nat*, popular among the Karen. For rebuking her parents and for neglecting the local *nat*, she paid the price by dying from exhaustion during the tiger-chase. She expired, gazing at the Golden Rock. Another account maintains that she fell ill at court after failing to perform a Karen ritual at the time of her marriage. Pregnant and with her foster-father and younger brother, she returned home from the court to propitiate the offended spirit. It was too late, since the spirit sent a tiger to scare the life out of her. When she died, her body turned into stone and resisted cremation (Tun Aung Chain & Thein Hlaing: 89). An inscription in one of her two pavilions declares that the hall was renovated in 2001 in the desire that "the effect of Shwe Nan Kyin's past deeds and sins be extinguished."



Fig. 29. Golden Rock in upper left. The flat rock with a stupa represent the ‘barge rock’ which transported the Golden Rock to the hilltop, after Thagyamin located it on the bottom of the ocean. Souvenir glass painting, c. 1905. Private collection, Rangoon.

In yet one more variant, the Thaton king met Shwe Nan Kyin at the Golden Rock at the time of a pilgrimage. It was love at first sight, but he broke his vow by never returning to marry her. Angry at this snub, Shwe Nan Kyin’s father then retaliated by trying to topple the Golden Rock, the object of the king’s devotion. Before this sacrilege could be committed, he was transformed into stone. This version is depicted at Inle Lake, at a pagoda beside the famous Shwe Yan Pye Monastery, near the entrance to Nyaungshwe, from the late nineteenth century. Three Burmese cartouches explain the action, one identifying her as a Karen. The father, now turned into a ‘stone-man’ in a tree, speaks to his daughter below; her father was transformed into stone for the attempted sacrilege toward the Golden Rock. Her brother is shown on the far right, coming to

avenge the family honor. In the Burmese caption she is called 'Nan Shwe' and the king is named 'Sihayaza,' who is the Thaton king named Siharaja in the basic legend.



Fig. 30. King of Thaton and Shwe Nan Kyin, courting, left. Shwe Nan Kyin's father turned to stone and talking to his daughter from the tree, Shwe Nan Kyin's brother enters from right. Shwe Yan Pye Pagoda. North entrance to Nyaungshwe. Inle. Late nineteenth century.

Shwe Nan Kyin should be considered a female *nat*, inasmuch as she met an unnatural death and is propitiated today. Her biography also underscores the time-honored virtues of devotion to parents, husband and to local gods. Also, there is the message that one cannot fool about with solid family values – even if one is a queen. Another theme is the role of loyalty and protection that falls to male family members.

Parallel themes were treated in a popular play, *The History of Thaton*, written by Saya Yaw and published in 1877 (Maung Tin Aung: 112). There is no mention of hair relics or pagodas, but the chief character is a woman raised by a non-Burmese tribe. She later became the queen of Thaton but was transformed into an ogress, through no fault of her own. She was then slain by her husband but came back to life as a *nat*; her brother and her son nearly killed the king, to avenge her death. These obvious similarities should not be viewed as direct influence of the Shwe Nan Kyin story but rather reflect deeply held cultural values. These themes continue to resonate in Burma, to judge from the success of a posthumously published novel, *Not out of Hate* (1991) by Ma Ma Lay (1917-1982). In this tale set at the end of the colonial period, the pregnant heroine fled from her oppressive husband to attend her father's funeral, contracted tuberculosis, returned home to her husband and died in his arms, un-reconciled. Although she died in the presence of her

husband, the disagreements with him and her alliance with her father underscore the social values that so many of these tales share.

The roots for Shwe Nan Kyin perhaps represents a conflation of two themes found in a well-known Mon chronicle, the *Lik Smin Asah*. In this account, for example, the legendary king of Thaton wed a woman who had been adopted by a Karen couple, a direct echo of Shwe Nan Kyin; she was not born from a snake egg but a pumpkin (Halliday: 178). The second theme relates to the mother of the famous Samala and Wimala, the two brothers who became the first kings of Hamsavati. Their mother was a snake-goddess in disguise, but she was poisoned by the king after her venomous snake-nature was revealed (Halliday: 159).

Shwe Nan Kyin's position in the Thaton court is her only meager link to the basic Kyaik-hti-yo legend, suggesting that she was grafted on to the narrative later, probably in the nineteenth century.

Inasmuch as so many of the tales end with Shwe Nan Kyin's father and the local Karens attempting unsuccessfully to dislodge the rock, her presence at the site also likely reflected tensions between the Burmese Buddhist community and Karen Christians in the late nineteenth century. For example, the Karen National Association (KNA) was formed in 1881 at a time of great strife between Burmese and Karen. A recent study exploring this pernicious conflict during this phase of colonial rule noted that "To the Burmans, the Christian Karen supported the foreign [British] demolition of the kingdom and the humiliation of Buddhism" (Gravers: 240). The folklore of Karen villagers intent on demolishing one of the country's most sacred sites sends a strong message. Their transformation into monkeys is seen as a humiliating but just punishment. Such anti-Karen sentiments enjoyed a long history. It was recorded, for example, in the 1920s that the rock "did not in fact touch the ground until the Karens tried to pull it down" (Enriquez: 61). These factors, however, are not meant to imply that Shwe Nan Kyin's presence at the Golden Rock can be reduced to simple ethnic and religious conflict. After all, that the vast bulk of worshippers there are Burmese Buddhists suggests the rich and complex social and religious milieu.

The Popularity of the Golden Rock

The Golden Rock became an important pilgrimage destination only during the second half of the nineteenth century. The unification of Upper and Lower Burma in 1886 must have enhanced the flow of pilgrims, but the real fillip to Kyaik-hti-yo's fortunes started in 1907 with the completion of the Pegu-Martaban railway line. Pilgrims were then able to halt at nearby Kyaikto and start the ascent from there, about eight miles. It was visited by thousands of pilgrims annually in the 1870s, long before Taw Sein Ko's visit in 1891 (Forbes 1878: 205-210). When the first small stupa was placed on top of the Kyaik-hti-yo rock is difficult to say, but all of the old photographs of the boulder, beginning in the early 1890s, if not before, show a small stupa perched on top (Temple: 361, pl. XVIII). A depiction of the rock occurs among the frescos of the Mahamuni Temple in Mandalay, probably from around 1892, in the south corridor. Below on the right are possibly the wizard and the snake-goddess, amidst the forest. This depiction is part of a series covering other major

Burmese pilgrimage spots, such as the Shwesettaw near Minbu and the Shwezigon at Pagan. This example and the representation of the rock in the Inle Lake area cited above prove that by the late nineteenth century the myth had entered the pantheon of national shrines.

Following the Thwarn-phyu Hsayadaw's residence at Kyaik-hti-yo and his restorations at Mt. Kusinara in the 1820s, the area attracted the great Ledi Hsayadaw (1846-1923) who is said to have meditated at Mt. Kusinara (Kyakhtisaung Hsayadaw: 16). Later, restorations of local monuments were undertaken in the 1920s by the Danubyu Hsayadaw, U Wimala (d. 1974) whose base of operations was also Mt. Kusinara (Cetana 1997b: 15).¹⁸

The rock's fame grew steadily and by the early twentieth century it was ranked together with the Shwedagon and the Mahamuni. This relationship is revealed in a glass-painting from probably around 1905. Laminated posters today routinely represent all three sites together, a sacred triumvirate. There also arose a complicated numerical reckoning of the numbers and planets associated with the syllables in the names of both Kyaik-hti-yo and the Shwedagon (Moore 2003: 157). Such connections express a bond between the two monuments transcending time and place for worshippers and thus enhancing the power of both. As a measure of how these two shrines are linked is a miniature depiction of the Shwedagon on the vane attached to the new *bti* at Kyaik-hti-yo in 2001. There was even once a huge replica of the Golden Rock at the Shwedagon, in the northwestern quadrant of the platform, in the 1930s and 1940s (Aung Than: fig. 7).



Fig. 31. The Kyaikhtisaung Hsayadaw (b. 1928) was instrumental in reviving interest in the discovery and renovation of the 'six hair relic' tradition. He resides in Zothoke, near Bilin. Cover page of his autobiography.

¹⁸ This information regarding the Ledi Hsayadaw and the Danubyu Hsayadaw was drawn only from the autobiography of the Kyaikhtisaung Hsayadaw and Cetana booklet on Kusinara; it has not been checked against other references.

A Revival of the Six Hair Relic Pagodas

A recent resurgence of the ‘six hair relics’ pagodas in the 1970s was spearheaded by a local monk named U Baddanta Pannadipa (1928-), better known as the Kyaikhtisaung *Hsayadam*, named after the Kyaikhtisaung stupa that the same monk refurbished outside the small town of Zothoke, five miles from Bilin. His mission was to restore the “sacred hair relic pagodas which were covered by the bushes in the jungle for years,” according to his autobiography (Kyaikhtisaung *Hsayadam*: 14). He continued to restore pagodas in the vicinity of Bilin in the 1980s and 1990s, concentrating on those associated with the six hair relics. In 1995, Lt. Gen. Maung Hla, a former member of the State Law and Order Council (SLORC), visited the Kusinara complex and then organized the refurbishment of the pagoda and the construction of a road, in cooperation with the Kyaikhtisaung *Hsayadam* (Cetana: 1997b, 18). In the late 1990s, the *hsayadam* joined forces with the indefatigable Khin Nyunt whose countless pagoda-restorations throughout Burma regularly filled the pages of the *New Light of Myanmar* and the airwaves on state television. These refurbishments in the Bilin area focused mainly on pagodas connected to the six hair relics.

A strong theme in the official announcements was the discovery and restoration of ruinous pagodas associated with the Buddha’s visit to Suvannabhumi. The model was the legendary king of Thaton who restored pagodas that had fallen into disuse since the visit of the Buddha and thereby revived Buddhism at the time of Sona and Uttara. Renewal of the faith by discovering and refurbishing old and abandoned shrines is a theme enshrined in Theravada traditions and embraced by today’s junta (currently called the State Peace and Development Council). One recent example was the ‘discovery’ of an old reclining brick Buddha in the immediate vicinity of the Shwethalyaung in Pegu, covered with vegetation and ‘lost.’ Restored in concrete, its cornerstone stakes were driven in 2002 and supervised by Khin Nyunt (*New Light of Myanmar* 14 August 2002).



Fig. 32. First-millennium stupa base, Zothoke, now enveloped in the ‘six hair relic’ tradition, beginning in the 1970s, promoted by the Kyaikhtisaung Hsayadaw.

Even new pagodas could be added to the list of six that received hairs at the time of the Buddha. Not surprisingly, the Kyaikhtisaung stupa in Zothoke was among them, marking the location where the Buddha gave a hair relic to two reformed ogres. The huge laterite base of the Zothoke pagoda belongs to the first millennium, providing an example of how many ancient monuments, whose original legends or relics are unknown, have acquired new legends, centuries after their creation. Another is the Kyaik Deyone Pagoda, on a hill called Doe Yoon, about nine miles from Bilin. The hair relic was given to a hermit named Doe Yoon, and the Kyaikthisaung *Hsayadaw* restored its pagoda in 1975. In 2006, the *hsayadaw* privately issued “*The History of the Nine Sacred Hair Relic Pagodas*,” a pamphlet listing all of the former six locations, plus three new additions (Kyaikthisaung Hsayadaw 2006). The basic myth therefore continues to stretch into new directions, adding three hairs to the original six. These sites are all in the vicinity of Bilin and the Golden Rock, a restricted region compared to the wide enshrinement of hair relics in Dhammaceti’s time, from the Rangoon area to near Thaton.

The Jewel in the Crown in these modern refurbishments, however, was the rebuilding of the stupa placed on top of the Golden Rock in 2001. It appears small in comparison to the boulder below, but it weighs in at approximately five tons. This new pagoda was prompted by a visit to the rock by Khin Nyunt who decided that the existing stupa, erected in 1936, required renewing. The *hti* was hoisted in March 2001.

Sacred Narratives: centripetal and centrifugal forces

The theme of the Buddha visiting Thaton and bestowing sacred strands to hermits was elastic and could be stretched to include new and old shrines following the fifteenth century. The ‘six hair relic’ myth fostered new groups of hermits and sacred sites, evinced by three distinct groups of hermits found in the *Gavampati* chronicle, c. 1710. These three groups, totaling fourteen hermits and an equal number of hair relics, likely represented coeval sub-traditions that the *Gavampati* compiler brought together into a continuous narrative. The other Mon text, the *Uppanna Sudhammavavati Rajavamsakatha* refers to only a single group of six hermits, but their names and locations are virtually identical to the last group cited above from the *Gavampati* text. Which of these two Mon texts is the earlier awaits further investigation.



Fig. 33. The Buddha in Thaton, dispensing two hair relics to a chief hermit, Kyauk Gauk, who deposits one in Kyauk Kauk Pagoda, Syriam, and the other in the Kyaikkasan Pagoda, Rangoon.



Fig. 34. Hermit Kyauk Gauk worshipping the hair relic he obtained at Thaton, now enshrined at Kyaik Kauk Pagoda, Syriam, Kyaik Kauk Pagoda platform.

This type of myth-creation is most easily understood by examining monuments whose legends became modeled on the Shwedagon legend. It became such an influential force following the fifteenth century that it served as a model for at least two key pagodas in Lower Burma. At their core were two lay merchant brothers who obtained hair relics from the Buddha in India (Shwemawdaw, Pegu) or in Burma (Shwesandaw, Pyei). These certainly replaced older myths in Pegu and in Pyei for which there is now no trace. In these examples, the basic myth is borrowed, with some modifications, and attached to a 'new' site, unrelated to the Shwedagon narrative.

In other cases, the myth is not borrowed as a model but is stretched to form 'satellite' sites. The Shwedagon again provides the clearest case study. The Sule Pagoda, for example, only entered the Shwedagon's orbit in the mid-nineteenth century when the new British city plan designated the Sule as the new urban hub. It became at that time tied to the Sule Nat whose assistance was critical in locating the lost relics on the Shwedagon Hill. The Sule Pagoda was important for centuries, but no evidence suggests that it was associated with the Shwedagon before the 1850s. The Botataung joined the Shwedagon narrative as late as the 1950s when the U Nu government reconstructed the pagoda after its destruction during the war. It became known at that time as the spot where King Okkalapa welcomed the brothers back from India and where the hair relics intended for the Shwedagon were guarded by the king's one thousand soldiers.

However, as late as the 1930s, the Botataung was known mainly as a memorial stupa for the cremation of King Okkalapa's son. The prince had drowned following a tragic love affair with the daughter of a legendary king ruling at Syriam named Bhogasena. The one thousand soldiers believed today to have guarded the Shwedagon relics were earlier said to be used only in building the commemorative stupa for the drowned prince. The cremation of the king's son has been completely forgotten among residents today, but one element of the story (the one thousand soldiers) was transferred seamlessly to the new myth centered on guarding the Shwedagon hair relics (Lloyd: 105; Bird: 156-157; Pearn: 93).

The Shwedagon myth was largely localized to Rangoon but could expand to even distant areas, such as a popular pilgrimage site near Cape Negrais at the western edge of the delta. A pagoda there was thought to mark the spot where the two brothers returning from India with the eight hair relics were robbed of two of the strands by Jayasena, a snake-king.

This shrine became 'attached' to the Shwedagon at least by the time of the composition of the *Glass Palace Chronicle* in the early nineteenth century (Tun Aung Chain & Thein Hlaing: 1). Such satellite sites were never threats to the popularity of the major core shrine. To the contrary, these diverse sites instead enhanced the Shwedagon's prestige and formed even more compelling narratives, as the roles that the Sule and Botataung play in the Shwedagon myth today.

Modern 'chronicles,' or pagoda-pamphlets, describing the Shwedagon have conflated all of these satellite sites, including the one at Cape Negrais, into a continuous narrative, overlooking the fact that the various shrines were added to the overarching myth at widely different times. In this way, disparate sites have come to be thematically related.

These examples reveal that the Shwedagon did not so much spawn lesser shrines as much as lesser sacred sites successfully attached their histories to the Shwedagon. The same was true for the tradition associated with the six hair relics. This explains not only the multiple groupings of hermits but also why very popular and revered sites, such as Mt. Kelasa, reappear in more than one list, or cluster of sacred peaks in different chronicles. This process of expansion still takes place, as the case of Zothoke's inclusion in the 'nine hair relic' legacy promoted by the Kyaikhtisaung Hsayadaw (Kyaikhtisaung Hsayadaw 2006).



Fig. 35. Kyaik-hti-yo in the mid-1960s. By Maung Saw Maung, Mandalay, c. 1965. Shwe Indein Pagoda, Indein, Inle Lake. c. 1965.

The Buddha's visit to Thaton and his meeting with one or more hermits provided therefore a mythic springboard for new but related traditions. Another example surrounds the Kyaik Kauk pagoda located outside modern Syriam, or Thanlywin. This stupa was founded by a hermit, or *yatbe*, named Yathe Gauk, who left his hermitage in Syriam to obtain a hair relic from the Buddha in Thaton, according to a nineteenth-century source. No reference to fellow hermits is made, but the basic outline of the story clearly derived from the fifteenth-century template. It is hard to say when this myth became attached to this very old laterite stupa outside of Syriam, but the story is probably no older than the eighteenth century (Furnivall: 148).



Fig. 36. Sule Nat's intervention was pivotal for locating the relics of the previous Buddhas, lost on Mt. Singuttara (Shwedagon Hill). Sule Pagoda, Rangoon.

Other separate traditions associate the same hermit from Syriam with the Kyaikkasan Pagoda in Rangoon. In one version, Yathe Gauk returns from Thaton with two hair relics, one deposited at the Kyaik Kauk in Syriam and the other at the Kyaikkasan. This pairing perhaps occurred when the Kyaikkasan was being rebuilt in 1839, according to a stone inscription on the pagoda platform.

The basic myth about the Buddha, hermits and Thaton could be stretched to the point where its basic structure was nearly blurred completely. For example, an unnamed Burmese chronicle from the nineteenth century contended that the Buddha flew to seven different locations in Lower Burma where he distributed nine hair relics in total. Two relics went to two hermits living on Mt. Zingyaik. Another was given to a recluse on Mt. Kelasa and another to a hermit on Mt. Zwegabin. One strand went to a hermit for the sacred Kyauk Kauk Pagoda in Syriam. Two hairs went to two brothers who began the Shwesandaw in Twante. Another hair relic was given to an unnamed hermit residing on Kyaik-hti-yo (Lloyd: 93-94).

These later traditions were never based directly upon the original myth recorded in the fifteenth-century stone inscriptions but rather a familiarity with its general outline, that is, the Buddha's visit to Thaton or Lower Burma and his bestowal of hair relics, a theme which has continuing relevance to worshippers.

This survey is testimony to the enduring nature of myths in Burma, their remarkable transformations over centuries and their continued relevance in the twenty-first century. Closer inspection of Mon and Burmese chronicles, local histories and travelers' accounts will likely reveal with more precision the steps by which the myths from Dhammaceti's fifteenth-century world were preserved and transformed and then later focused on the Golden Rock. This preliminary appraisal is to sketch a basic outline of the site's history; further study may well modify or reverse the tentative conclusions presented here. Southeast Asian myths are like Gordian Knots, with interwoven strands that resist unraveling.

The Golden Rock also underscores the importance of relics, as much for devotees as for royal or state patrons who require relics to fulfill their role as promoters and defenders of the faith. The *Dhamma* and *Sangha* were not enough for Buddhism to flourish, as the king of Thaton pleaded when he requested the Buddha for relics, as revealed in the fifteenth-century Mon inscriptions. His terrestrial realm required relics, or *Buddha-ratana*, to complete the Three Jewels. The original locations associated with the six hair relics in Dhammaceti's day are unknown today, apart from Mt. Kelasa, but they were once spread between Rangoon and the Thaton area and were not clustered in the Thaton area as they are thought of today. Also, none of the legendary hermits in the fifteenth century were associated with engaging biographies nor did the Thaton king play a role in establishing any of the hair-relic pagodas. The Thaton king simply hosted the six hermits when they collected in Thaton to receive the six hair relics.

If Dhammaceti were to find himself today in his old Suvannabhumi, he would surely be astonished to learn that three of the six hair relics are currently thought to be inside the Golden Rock. He would also be surprised to know that more hairs and more locations have been added to the list of six and that the hermits were now draped in colorful personal stories. Dhammaceti would be pleased to read in the *New Light of Myanmar* about the vaunted efforts of the government to safeguard the faith by restoring pagodas associated with the tradition that began in his reign over four hundred years ago. But this former king would probably sense that the Three Jewels have been pushed out of balance recently, weighted far too heavily toward *Buddha-ratana* at the expense of *Sangha-ratana* and *Dhamma-ratana*.

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The Ecology of Burman-Mon Warfare and the Premodern Agrarian State (1383-1425)¹

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Bangkok Post

Introduction: the Premodern State

Court ritual, political theory, the conduct of warfare, the interpretation of omens, sage advice from wise ministers to kings, as well as many other domains of indigenous knowledge are described in rich detail by the indigenous historical chronicles of Southeast Asia. Indigenous historical chronicles did many things besides chronicle history.

The narratives of Burmese and Mon historical chronicles have a strong fictional character. Plot enhancing story elements, often quite melodramatic, range from love, trickery, and chase scenes to supernatural interventions in history and are mixed freely with fact and enliven dry historical detail. The Pali Buddhist literary traditions of India found in story collections such as the *Jatakas*, the Dhammapada Commentary, or the *Mahavamsa Tika* are clearly an inspiration if not the source of these historical adornments, an influence made quite explicit in the later *Jataka*-based explanations of Burmese history in Shin Sandá-lin-ka's *The Treasured Precedents* (*Mani-yadana-poun*, translated by Eun Bagshawe, 1981).

A modern historian would quite reasonably not accept these fictional portrayals as pure Rankean factual history. At the same time, the minutiae of military operations and court ritual, described in a precise and non-fictional manner, have the outward appearance of historical documentation. Dry technical military details disqualify much of the narrative as literature, one would think. Therefore, what exactly are these texts?

Is the "fiction" found within Burma's historical texts merely entertainment to be discarded by a serious historian or does it have some deeper significance as, for instance, an intellectual history of ideas that historians wove into the fabric of the history they were writing? And, if so, what period is this intellectual history associated with? The earlier period in which the events are described such as the relatively autonomous Ava period of Burmese history (1368-1551) or from some much later period such as the Kòn-baung period (1752-1885) in which European influence on historical writing is already seen?

¹ The present article is a revised version of a paper presented at the conference on Mon history and culture at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand; *Discovery of Ramanya Desa: History, Identity, Culture, Language and Performing Arts*, 10-13 October 2007. The author would like to thank the Siam Society Library, Michael Charney, Donald Stadtner, and Terry Fredrickson for their help and encouragement.

Finally, can one answer these questions with absolute certainty? To take one extreme example, the debate over whether the literary history of the Greek Iliad corresponds to fact has oscillated from one extreme to another over literally hundreds of years with no absolute certain resolution in sight, disagreement and debate perhaps even being an inherent part of the search for certainty (Strauss 2006, 225-229).

Given the wealth of information in indigenous historical chronicles, the question naturally arises *why scholars have not used indigenous chronicles more intensively in conceptualizing models of the premodern agrarian Southeast Asian State*. The so-called *mandala* and “galactic polity” models have remained the mainstay in Southeast Asian history for quite some time (see for example Tambiah 1976; Wolters 1999). These dominant models, however, address only a tiny fraction of the many dimensions of the premodern agrarian state. This paper explores the inter-relationships between two understudied dimensions, warfare and the natural environment, of the premodern agrarian state in Burma.

Although it is conceivable that small premodern city states such as Bassein or Martaban in Lower Burma owed much of their wealth and food supply to long distance maritime trade (Malacca even relied on rice shipments from Pegu in the early 1500s), most settlements in Burma were highly dependent on local agriculture for their food supply and surplus wealth. One can characterize the premodern states of Burma as “agrarian states” and as such, they should share many characteristics of this general class of states whether they are inside or outside of Southeast Asia. There is no *a priori* reason why comparisons should be restricted to Southeast Asia, especially given its radically different geographies and natural environments.

Agriculture was highly dependent on the local constraints imposed by the natural environment surrounding a settlement. Local agricultural regimes in turn enabled warfare in the premodern state as Perdue (1996, 759) observes for premodern Chinese history: “ultimately the resources of men, food, money, weaponry, and prestige had to be extracted, purchased and produced from the agrarian substructure.” In short, a local settlement’s potential for success in warfare was in a large part determined by local environmental constraints.

Warfare itself, however, took place outside of the local settlement. Premodern warfare exposed a society to the vicissitudes of nature outside the immediate ecological habitat of the local settlement. Military expeditions had to overcome the impediments of topography, environment, geography, and demography, this can be seen by the great amounts of space in Burmese historical chronicles devoted to: 1. counts of animals mobilized for warfare, 2. the exact routes taken during military campaigns, and most importantly 3. detailed descriptions of situations that arose when there was not enough food during a military campaign, during sieges or after scorched earth.

Scholars usually study warfare and the natural environment in isolation from each other. This paper enlists the help of various models and paradigms to help draw the two together conceptually.

The factors operative in the premodern state can be broken down into three interacting levels: infrastructure, structure, and superstructure. Infrastructure consists of environment, demography, climate, and agriculture. Structure consists of politics, economics, and social organization. Superstructure consists of

ideology, religion, and political theory (Ferguson 1999). A diagram from Johnson and Earle (2000) describes how these three levels were related:

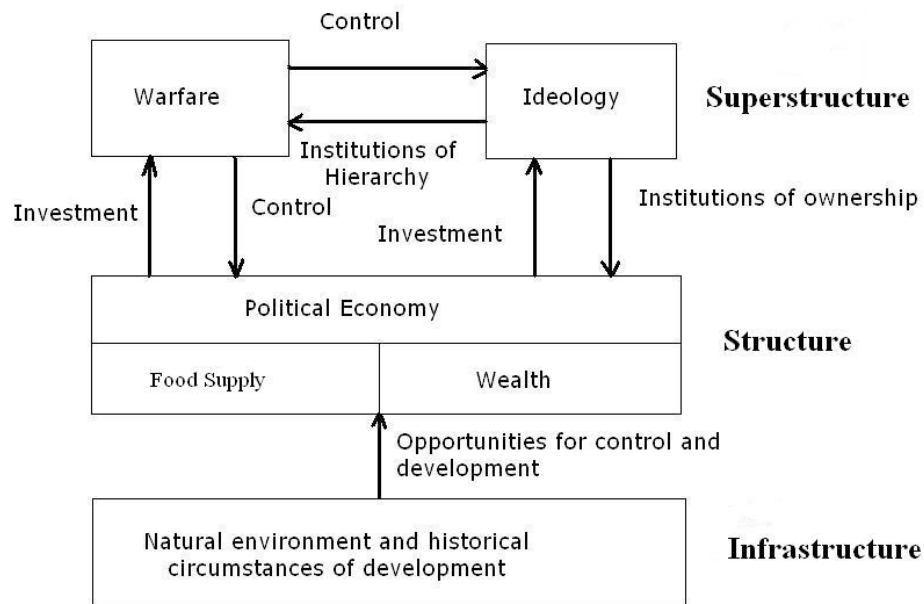


Figure 1 Earle's Chiefly Power Strategies

A hypothetical "ecological chain of causation" is also proposed that links infrastructure to warfare:

Environment => Land => Agriculture => Food Supply =>
=> Manpower-Animal Power => Warfare => State Formation

Environment → Land → Agriculture → Food-supply → Man-animal power → Warfare → State Formation

Figure 2 Ecological chain of causation in state formation

Scholars use formal ecological models such as Turchin (2003) to further elaborate this chain of causation and describe how long-term ecological patterns (Braudel's *longue duree*) played out in the short-term events of warfare (*histoire evenementuelle*).

Specifically, this paper looks at a series of conflicts that took place along the middle of the Irrawaddy River in Burma during the period 1389 to 1411. The beginning of the fifteenth century was a special time in Burman and Mon history. Coming almost a century after the decline of Pagan, the period was the subject of the greatest epic of warfare in the Burmese and Mon languages, *Rajadhirat*, known as *Razadarit Ayeidampon* in Burmese. The epic tale of *Rajadhirat* records the history of a long war between Lower Burma and Upper

Burma (c. 1383-1425) which survives to this day in a collection of manuscripts written in three different languages: Mon, Burmese, and Thai (Banyadala; San Lwin; Chao Phraya Khlang 2003). Many of the events recorded in *Rajadhirat* find correlates in Û Kalà's *Great Chronicle* (*Maha-ya-ṣawin-gyī*) (1961, 2006), the first wide-ranging and inclusive royal chronicle of "Myanmar" as the state is referred to in the chronicle itself. Ming Chinese sources such as the *Ming Shi-lu* (Wade 2005), and sources from coastal Arakan on the border with Bengal also cover some of the same events. There is no standard name for the war discussed in this paper, nor is there agreement on how long the war lasted, or even perhaps whether these disparate conflicts warrant classification as a war at all. Historians have referred to these events in various ways:

- a. "the grueling north-south wars of the 14th to 16th centuries" Lieberman (2003, 130)
- b. "the north-south conflicts of 1385-1425" Lieberman (2003, 130)
- c. The "Burman-Mon wars" Lieberman (2003, 130)
- d. The "intermittent wars between Pegu and Ava" (1386-1422) (Tun Aung Chain 2002)

This paper will refer to these conflicts as the "Ava-Pegu War (1383-1425)." This name and periodization uses the names of the two capitals or political centers, makes the most limited assumptions about the extent of control that these political centers had and avoids over-generalizing the Mon and Burmese ethnic composition of the ruling elite to the diverse populations mobilized during the wars. The starting date for the war coincides with the beginning of Rajadhirat's succession crisis (see Fernquest 2006a, 5-6). The ending date coincides with the end of military expeditions by Ava into Lower Burma also largely a result of a succession crisis, at Ava in 1426, and subsequent political instability in Upper Burma (See Fernquest 2006b, 55-61).

The *Great Chronicle* and the *Rajadhirat* epic have a semi-historical nature, combining history, fiction, and lessons on politics in one multi-vocal text. The character of the hero Lagunein in *Rajadhirat* pushes the fictional theme of heroism to the limit with his continual excessive behavior. In one early episode, the hero refuses fight until the king presents him with his queen. In another episode, the hero enters the bedroom of the enemy king and steals his sword from right under his nose while he sleeps. Later, the hero cannot even keep a planned ambush secret, so eager is he to deride the enemy's stupidity to their face. For this, the hero is to suffer the death penalty, but is given a chance to redeem himself by further heroic deeds and in the act of doing so suffers a proper heroic death in battle (Fernquest 2006a).

In two places, *Rajadhirat* strongly hints at the principles of indigenous Indian political theory (*Arthasastra*). The work effectively provides lessons in political theory by suitable modifications in the emplotment of history. The king is described as a ruler "highly qualified in the art of vanquishing enemies" with knowledge of the four *upayas*. "*Upaya*" has various translations including "means of policy," "influence techniques," "stratagems," "means of overcoming the enemy," or "skillful means." The four *upayas* are concerned with military tactics and strategy in an abstract sense and are thoroughly secular. Roughly, they run

as follows: agreement (*sama*), sowing dissension (*bbeda*), punishment (*danda*), gifts (*dana*) (Fernquest, forthcoming).

The present study is broken into five sections as follows. First, it looks at conflicts over the middle Irrawaddy (1389-1411) from various perspectives with different sets of historical data, including changes in chronicle lists of settlements; the observations of a British colonial-era gazetteer, the narrative of Kalā's *Great Chronicle* and the Rajadirat epic. Previous papers (Fernquest 2006a, 2006b) have discussed in detail the larger context of these conflicts in the Ava-Pegu War (1383-1426).

Second, it then describes the historical geography of Lower Burma and the middle Irrawaddy River basin and draws out the implications for military power. Historically, the north-to-south orientation of the Irrawaddy River has broken the east-to-west orientation of settlements in Lower Burma. This fragmented geography together with the limited farming potential and difficult terrain of the Irrawaddy Delta, contributed to an underlying localism in Lower Burma's geography. Viewed in this context, the middle Irrawaddy River region is a pivotal thoroughfare providing access to the delta region, Lower Burma, and food supply located along the river. Battles over this strategically important stretch of river are a crucial turning point in the Ava-Pegu War with food supply and adjustments in military logistics playing a crucial role in the course of the conflicts. Apparently, because of the difficult nature of Lower Burma's geography, the Burmans never established a military outpost any further south than Tharrawaddy on the Irrawaddy River, before the delta even begins.

Third, ecological patterns conditioned the long-term conduct of warfare. The regular yearly cycle of changing climate and agriculture conditioned the way wars were fought if manpower was to be optimally conserved. The subsistence crisis was used as an extension or weapon of war. Long-term climate patterns may have increased the potential for these subsistence crises.

Fourth, from the underlying constraints of environment and ecology in warfare the paper passes to the dynamics of warfare. A cycle of expansionary warfare explains how military success fueled further military success through the accumulation of geopolitical resources such as land, food supply, and manpower. A marchland factor also was operative in which enemies on fewer fronts aided the expansionary warfare of a state. Eventually, imperial overstretch and logistical overload resulted in a reverse process of state contraction in which the resources accumulated during expansionary warfare were quickly lost. Scorched earth tactics in which local food supplies were destroyed were part of the offensive strategy of expansionary warfare, whereas flight to the hinterland was part of the defensive response.

Finally, in the conclusion the paper re-examines the agrarian nature of the Burmese state suggesting that general cross-cultural models of premodern agrarian states lead to richer explanations than the region-specific *mandala* or "galactic polity" models traditionally employed in Southeast Asian history. Cross-cultural models allow for more realistic multi-causal explanations of historical events. They also allow for the posing and testing of a wide variety of different hypotheses and the possibility that disparate, geographically unrelated cultures, have shared historical experiences and processes. A Bayesian approach that brings in and

integrates knowledge of other premodern agrarian states in the form of a priori probabilities is suggested as one approach to crafting such a multi-threaded history of *what-might-have-happened*.

Taken together, the six sections of this paper demonstrate how various seemingly fictional elements typically found in Southeast Asian historical chronicles, fictional elements often conceived of as a historical deficit, rather provide rich details that should be conceived instead as a historical surfeit worthy of study in and of itself.

North-south conflicts over the Irrawaddy river basin (c. 1389-1411)

In the century following the decline of Pagan, Tai raids on Upper Burma brought land out of cultivation and reduced the population, but by 1368 Upper Burma had begun a process of recovery under the leadership of the King of Ava, Mingyiswasawke (r. 1368-1400). Irrigation works were repaired and extended. The new king built the Zidaw irrigation weir at Ava's principal granary at Kyaukse and improved the irrigation infrastructure at Meiktila Lake further south. Prior to this period, land in areas remote to the capital had been abandoned and lapsed into jungle during the conflicts of the previous century due to a lack of manpower and perhaps a need to live in more concentrated and protected settlements. During the present period, this lapsed land was brought back into cultivation often with the help of religious orders (UKI: 424; Harvey 1925, 81; Than Tun 1959, 92-96; Lieberman 1991, 5-12; for detailed background on these events, see Fernquest, 2006b).

Lower Burma, the middle Irrawaddy and Arakan were all areas of contention in the Ava-Pegu War. What intrinsic value did these areas possess that could possibly motivate and spur on this contention? Lower Burma and Arakan are both located on the coast so access to maritime trade revenues was one possible motive. However, there is very little concrete historical evidence to support this hypothesis. Trade, tribute, manpower, religious conversion, prestige, or easier access to Buddhist India and Sri Lanka are all possible motivations for warfare. Some multi-causal combination seems much more likely than a single mono-causal explanation.

There was also a truce between Ava and Pegu circa 1406 that demarcated a north-south boundary between the two states. This provides some evidence that trade access was an important motive in warfare. In addition to marking a boundary, items were exchanged between the two sides. In the bargain, Pegu provided tribute of 30 War elephants and the customs revenue of Bassein. The king of Ava provided his sister Min-hla-myat in a marriage alliance (UKI: 493-503; SL 88-90; Harvey 1925, 91, Tun Aung Chain, 41, Fernquest 2006a, 12). Bassein's population appears to have been much greater than other settlements in Lower Burma, if we accept the census of 1580 as a long-term indicator of Bassein's relative population (See table 3). Moreover, Rajadhirat encountered stiff resistance at Bassein, apparently helped by foreign mercenaries, in his consolidation of Lower Burma.

There is evidence that Upper Burma elites valued access to maritime ports. The title that the King Mingyiswasawke adopted, "Lord of the Gold Mines, the Silver Mines, and the Ruby Mines and the Ports and

Umbrella-bearing Kings,” reduces Upper Burma metonymically to its economic value of precious stones and Lower Burma to the access to maritime transportation. Trade is not mentioned here, and at low levels of exchange, trade is hardly distinguishable from mutual gift exchange between elites, exchanges that reinforced political relations and enhanced prestige. Frequent missions to deliver tribute from Southeast Asian capitals to the Chinese capital during the Yuan and Ming dynasties were of this nature. A circa 1067 mission from Sri Lanka seeking military aid, brought with it valuable goods not found in Burma, including camphor and sandalwood that would have had exchange value in trade, as inducements to elites in Lower Burma to participate in military campaigns (Luce 1966, 59-60). This also seems to rank more as a form of elite gift exchange on the margins of what could be considered trade. Yet one motive for sending these missions may have been the trade and exchange engaged in during these missions. Contact with other Buddhist communities in India and Sri Lanka may have been a far more important motive for Upper Burma obtaining access to ports and establishing permanent control over Lower Burma (Frasch 2002, 66).

The extension of cultivated acreage that accompanied economic recovery in Upper Burma during Mingyiswasawke’s reign is evident by comparing lists of domains subject to Upper Burma at the beginning and at the end of his reign (See Table 1 and 2 below):

Table 1 - Ava at beginning of Min-gyi-swa-saw-ke’s reign (1368) (UKI: 423; cited in ROB 10, 2)

Southern	Toungoo, Taung-dwin-gyi, Yamethin, Nyaung-yan, Wadi, Yei-hlwe-nga-hkayaing, Meikkaya
Northern	Myedu, Tabeyin
Irrawaddy River	Tagaung, Sagaing, Pa-kan-gyi, Talok, Pagan, Sagu, Prome (Pyi)
Unknown	Taung-pyon-gyi, Wa-yin-tot, Pauk-myaing

Table 2 – Ava at end of Mingyiswasawke’s reign (1400) (UKI: 480; cited in ROB 10, 2-3)

Southern	Toungoo, Taung-dwin-[gyi], Yamethin, Wadi, Yindaw, Pinle, Hlaingtet, Nyaung-yan, Myin-saing, Meikkaya, Pindale, Pyinsi, Kyauk-pa-daung, Pattanago, Pin, Nat-maw, Thagara
Northern	Myedu, Yei-ne, Si-bok-taya, Sitha, Tabeyin, Badon, Amyint, Kanni, Yaw, Hti-lin, Laung-shei
Irrawaddy River	Hkyun-taung, Mya-taung, Tagaung, Nga-sinku, Sagaing, Pa-kan-gyi, Talok, Pagan, Ywa-tha, Sagu, Sale, Pa-kan-nge, Ye-nan-hkyaung, Salin, Le-kaing, Mye-hte, Tha-yet, Mindon, Min-tat, Prome (Pyi), Tharrawaddy

By the end of Mingyiswasawke’s reign, Ava’s control extended into new regions such as the Lower Chindwin, the Upper Irrawaddy past Tagaung, and of concern here, further south along the Irrawaddy to Tharrawaddy. Ava’s control was also intensified in the regions already held, with most of the new settlements in the 1400 list being settlements within the outermost settlement boundaries of the 1386 list. Whereas in 1386 there were only five settlements along the Irrawaddy River from Pagan to Prome, in 1400 there were thirteen settlements.

These tables are based on categories that are implicit in Kalà's historical chronicle. The towns have been grouped by the three-fold regional classification used by Kalà in the later 1400 place name list: Northern, Southern, and Irrawaddy. The names in each list are in the order of their location along the principle axis of the region, either a river or, in the case from Kyaukse to Toungoo, a straight north-south axis bounded by mountain ranges. The "southern" region includes settlements stretching from Kyaukse, adjacent to the capital of Ava, down to Toungoo and Taung-dwin-gyi on the frontier between Upper and Lower Burma. The "northern" region includes settlements along the Mu and Chindwin Rivers. The "Irrawaddy" region includes all settlements along the Irrawaddy from the Tai-Shan region (Tagaung) north of Ava, down past Pagan to Prome and Tharrawaddy in the sub-delta region.

Increased land reclamation efforts during the period of the Ava-Pegu War (c. 1383-1425) can be seen in the Burmese inscriptional references to land reclamation efforts cited by Lieberman (1991, 7): 1377, 1395, 1396, 1397, 1400, 1402, 1404, 1405, 1435, 1437, 1442, and 1495. Eight out of twelve of these efforts occurred during the war or leading up to the war. The Rajadhirat years appears to have been both a period during which agriculture as well as warfare intensified.

The large-scale pattern of conflict over land during the Ava-Pegu War was of interest to British colonial officials. The Gazetteer of the Tharrawaddy District found the history of alternating control over the lower Irrawaddy during the Ava-Pegu War of sufficient interest to include a summary and analysis. The extent to which the analysis of the gazetteer suffers from imposing colonial notions of territorial control is a problem to watch out for (cf Thongchai 1994). One should therefore read the gazetteer's analysis cautiously. The analysis does, however, take a unique large-scale big picture view of a series of events that it is easy to get bogged down in the details of.

Shortly after Rajadhirat overcame a succession crisis and seized power at Pegu in 1383, a war began with Ava making an initial push into the delta. Laukpya, a local lord in Lower Burma, who had participated in the succession dispute of 1383, is said to have called upon Ava to invade:

In 1386 Minkyizwa[sawke], King of Ava, attacking Pegu sent out two columns, one to move down the valley of the Sittang, the other through the Tharrawaddy down the valley of the Hlaing or Myitmaka [along the Irrawaddy]. This invasion being unsuccessful it was renewed the following year and again a force went by land down the Hlaing river as far as the town of Hlaing [along the Irrawaddy], where they were defeated by the Talaings [Pegu forces] under Razadirit [Rajadhirat] and pursued as far as Prome, but *no permanent occupation* of Tharrawaddy was effected by the victors [Pegu] (Perkins, 1959, 24).

Without first having consolidated control over the far flung domains of Lower Burma, it would have been premature for Rajadhirat to establish a remote outpost at Tharrawaddy, located in the transition area between Lower Burma and Upper Burma along the Irrawaddy. Rajadhirat's conquest and consolidation of the various

relatively isolated domains of Lower Burma may have actually been spurred on by Ava's unsuccessful invasion of 1386, as a security measure to protect Pegu from further future invasions. The inherent localism of Lower Burma's geography and the implications this would have had for the nature of political control will be addressed further below.

Lacking coordination, Ava soon withdrew its forces to the north again and Rajadhirat did not erect any outposts or garrisons to assert control over the lower Irrawaddy. By 1390, after fighting off this first incursion by Ava, Rajadhirat had consolidated his hold over Lower Burma asserting control over the whole delta area right up the Irrawaddy to Myanaung south of Prome and erected fortifications to defend these positions (Fernquest 2006a, 6-7):

...from reference in the Hmannan history it would appear that about 1389 there were Talaing [Mon, Pegu] *outposts* Hlaing and Hmawbi while on the Talaing *frontier post* was at Gudut [Myanaung]. Two years later [1391] it would appear that the Talaings had *withdrawn from the district*, for it is related in the above mentioned that the people of Prome found a white elephant in Tharrawaddy and the King of Ava came down to enquire into the matter. Thereupon Razadarit advanced with large forces and the King of Ava withdrew after protesting the peaceful nature of his designs (Perkins 1959, 24).

The analysis of the gazetteer here assumes that an outpost or frontier post implies military and political control over an area and that an elephant expedition would have never proceeded into an area with an outpost. The function of an outpost seems to have been more of a surveillance and monitoring function for an area, a trip wire to warn of unauthorized activity in an area, rather than a garrison to provide an area with outright military protection. In fact, the elephant expedition might not have been aware that the area was being so monitored. The existence of an outpost could also be essentially a literary artifact added after the fact to attest to the fact that the area was in fact being monitored, and that the elephant expedition into the area by the king of Ava triggered a military response by Pegu.

Nonetheless, the event as recorded in the chronicle does appear to be significant and a critical turning point. What appears to have been a marked informality in the use and territorial control of this middle Irrawaddy region before, as exemplified by the King of Ava's elephant hunting expedition, starts to escalate into contention. After the accession of King Mingaung at Ava in 1400, Ava firmed up control over the lower Irrawaddy by the appointment of an official, as noted in the gazetteer:

At this time [1389] Tharrawaddy was apparently disputed territory but the Talaings soon gave up all claim to it for in 1402 we find Tharrawaddy mentioned as the headquarters of a *myoza* subordinate to Ava. Three years later [1405] the frontier between the two kingdoms of Pegu and Ava was defined and the line of

demarcations was drawn from Tabintayaung on the west to Sapaka on the east. In 1409 Tharrawaddy was fortified by Mingaung of Ava, and Razadirit [Rajadhirat] was withstood at Banan. (Perkins 1959, 24)

In stressing boundaries here the gazetteer neglects the very conflicts that led to frequent changes in boundaries. In fact, continual conflict rather than setting boundaries is far more salient in the indigenous historical narrative itself. The period discussed by the gazetteer here corresponds roughly to a long period of contention between Ava and Pegu over the middle section of the Irrawaddy River and its food supply from 1405 to 1411 (Fernquest 2006a, 12-16).

After this, the Ava-Pegu War (1383-1426) moves south along the Irrawaddy and drags on in the delta region with no decisive assertion of Ava's control over Lower Burma beyond Tharrawaddy. In 1426, there was a large-scale succession crisis at Ava and a state of internal warfare bordering on civil war in Upper Burma forced Ava to turn inwards and deal with this problem (Fernquest 2006b, 55-61).

In summary, following the accession of Rajadhirat to the throne of Pegu, Pegu made continual assertions of control of territory along the Irrawaddy up to Myanaung just before Prome, but in the end Ava consolidated control over the Middle Irrawaddy, as evidenced by domain lists in the chronicle. Tharrawaddy was the southernmost settlement that Ava erected fortifications at.

The name of the settlement Tharrawaddy signifies the wealth of the middle Irrawaddy and sub-deltaic regions. The name "Tharrawaddy" is *Saravati* in Pali combining the Pali words *sara* (wealth, substance) and *vanta* (indicating possession). In the Tharrawaddy gazetteer, Perkins observes that, "the district was probably so-called owing to its natural wealth in timber and paddy which sent much revenue to the royal exchequer; Burmese writers say it was so-called because of the large amount of revenue it yielded" (Perkins 1959, 1). We turn next to the full detailed account of warfare along the Irrawaddy as found in Kalā's *Great Chronicle*.

The conflict between Ava and Pegu over the middle Irrawaddy Basin took place over a long period of time stretching from 1389 to 1411. In the first conflict over this region, Laukpya, a local ruler in Lower Burma, played a pivotal role. Laukpya had changed sides and struck an alliance with Ava shortly after the 1383 succession struggle at Pegu and Rajadhirat's rise to power. In 1386, allied with Laukpya, Ava invaded Lower Burma before Rajadhirat was able to fully consolidate control over all the localities of Lower Burma after his succession. After Rajadhirat had repulsed Ava's invasion, he redoubled his efforts to bring all of the statelets of Lower Burma under his control.

Myaungmya, ruled by Laukpya, was the last statelet to be subjected in 1389. This allowed the collective man and animal power, as well as food supply of Bassein, Myaungmya, and Khepaung to be mobilized for further expansionary warfare up the Irrawaddy River (SL: 73). Rajadhirat allowed Laukpya to live out his remaining days as a monk at the Shwedagon Pagoda but shortly afterwards Laukpya died. Laukpya's sons Byagun and Thametbyakyin fled to the protection of Ava with their elephants, horses, and followers, and were given the important strategic locations along the Irrawaddy River of Salin and Prome to

govern over, respectively (UKI: 454). Both of Laukpya's sons played a prominent role in the subsequent conflict over the middle Irrawaddy River basin.

The second conflict over the middle Irrawaddy occurred shortly after Pegu's failed attempt to take and occupy Ava. In 1404 Pegu attacked and occupied Ava for a short period. Ava was weak and still reeling from the effects of the succession crisis that followed the death of the long ruling King Mingyiswasawke (UKI: 473-484). The following year in 1405, Pegu attacked and took Myanaung and then moved on to a siege of Prome (UKI: 487). During the siege the lord of Myo-hla was able to break out of Prome, send word of the siege, and call for a relief force from Ava (UKI: 488). Ava sent a relief force, and although Pegu forces successfully repelled them, the Ava forces were able to continue their advance on Prome shortly afterwards (UKI: 489-490). Although the Ava side had some initial success, the situation at Prome soon devolved to a stalemate and the two sides negotiated a truce (UKI: 494-511).

A fundamental change in Ava's northern frontier with Ming China starting from 1406 and had a far-reaching geopolitical impact that stretched as far as the north-south Ava-Pegu War in Burma (Fernquest 2006b). In this year the Ming under the Yong-le emperor started moving large numbers of military personnel out of Yunnan to northern Vietnam. The Ming occupation of northern Vietnam [Annam] and this displacement of military forces would last until 1426. Already in 1403 first the small Tai state of Onpaung-Hsenwi, in what is now the southern Shan states of Burma, had voluntarily been incorporated into the kingdom of Ava as a tributary state (UKI: 472) and then in 1405 Nyaungshwe also in the southern Shan states also followed suit (UKI: 486). So already before the Ming withdrawal from the Tai region of Yunnan, ties had developed between Ava and Tai states bordering Yunnan.

After 1406, there is increasing evidence of forceful military campaigns into the Tai region bordering Yunnan (Fernquest 2006a, 50-53). Tai manpower and animal power seized in these military actions was used in Ava's campaigns against Pegu in the south. This increment in military manpower on the Ava side seems to have led to an increased incidence of subsistence crises during the military campaigns of the Ava-Pegu war.

The third conflict over the middle Irrawaddy took place in 1408 and ran from the battle of Pangyaw to the Mingaung's great retreat back to Ava. As the war gathered momentum from 1405 to 1411 food supply became the critically important factor during long campaigns. Hostilities between Pegu and Ava switched to a fight over Arakan for a time, perhaps over trade, but in 1408 hostilities over the Middle Irrawaddy were renewed when Pegu defeated Ava at Pangyaw by trapping them in a tidal current moving up the river.

After Ava's defeat at Pankyaw, Ava far away from home and facing a dwindling food supply, entered into negotiations for a truce (Fernquest 2006a, 14; SL 95-99). An inadequate food supply posed a strategic predicament for Ava, it ruled out both a further attack as well as an orderly withdrawal back to Ava. On home ground, Pegu most likely did not face the same food supply problem as Ava did, so its forces were in better condition to fight. On their initial advance into Pegu territory, Ava's foraging parties had depleted the countryside of food stocks, so to gather further food supplies:

[Minhkaung sent] foraging parties totaling about three thousand strong as far as Paukngu, Malauk, Dawgon, Awtit and Taungnyo. Rajadhirat sent Samim Awanannaing after these foraging parties to ambush them on their return. As these parties came back bent under baskets of rice in the husk they made easy prey and five to six hundred were killed, over two hundred were captured alive, as were male and female elephants and over twenty horses. This happened two or three times. Thus casualties mounted and when they had to forage further and further, *what meager provisions these parties could collect were mostly consumed during their travels to and fro*. To the West dense jungle barred their entry and to the east numerous lakes, swamps and morasses hindered their travels. Enemy ambushes made foraging costly. Therefore little rice was to be had and famine stalked the troops (SL 97).

As Diamond (2005, 165) notes of human porters carrying food supplies to forces on the march, “beyond a march of a few days to a week, it becomes uneconomical to send porters to carry corn [or rice in our case] to provision armies.” This describes what was essentially a universal of premodern agrarian warfare, logistical overload and over-extension leading to military failure.

Various attempts at a truce failed and Avan forces were forced to make a costly and disastrous retreat northwards back to Ava. This retreat was an important turning point in the war (Harvey 1925, 94; UKI: 528-532). In the later Kòn-baung era *The Treasured Precedents*, this second battle is subject to extensive interpretation and commentary, using various Buddhist folklore stories as a basis for interpretation. The Sakkunaggi Jataka is enlisted to draw a moral from this historical episode. A hawk catches a quail outside of its natural habitat. The quail tells the hawk that if it had been in its natural habitat that his strength would have been equal to the hawk’s. The hawk takes the challenge, releases the quail but ends up smashing its head against the ground in pursuit after the quail disappears down a hole in the ground (Bagshawe 1981, 110-112).

After 1409, the king of Ava’s son, Prince Minyekyawswa, took over from his father as the principle commander. The prince undertook a much more active and aggressive approach in the campaigns in the south, combining them with manpower raids into the northern Tai (Shan) frontier zone with Ming Yunnan in order to bolster the human and animal might of his army (Fernquest 2006b, 48-55).

In the fourth battle for the middle Irrawaddy Basin, we see an instance of “marchlands” geographical advantage at work. The Tai statelets were no longer a threat to Ava as they had been the century before and had been transformed into a target for manpower raids and a source of strength in warfare. In contrast, Pegu in the south was still vulnerable to attacks from Tai statelets in the central mainland. Rajadhirat attacked Prome in 1411 while Ava was campaigning against Tai states in the north. When Kamphaengphet in turn attacked Martaban, Rajadhirat was forced to pull some of the troops away from Prome to deal with the problem (UKII: 10, SL: 112-113).

Events came to a head around 1411. When Rajadhirat rushed back from Prome to Pegu to defend against the invasion by Kamphengphet in 1411, he blockaded the river north of Prome to prevent food supplies sent by Ava along the river from reaching Prome (SL: 112-113). Ava was still able to evade the

blockade, establish a stockade at Nawin, and supply Prome with food. The food supply advantage reversed once again when Ava laid siege to Pegu forces at Prome, capturing food supply boats sent from Pegu and forcing them into starvation (Fernquest 2006a, 17 summarizing SL 114-115). When Ava attacked Prome, Rajadhirat sent provisions and then returned to Prome himself (SL: 113-116). The death of the Mon warrior Lagunein marks the epic climax of the narrative and the turning point. From this point forwards, almost all the fighting will be in the delta of Lower Burma with Pegu defending its territory.

Pressing into the delta region shortly after that, Ava occupied the delta for the duration of the rainy season and as a result most, of the land in the western delta region could not be put under cultivation except for some land immediately adjacent to large settlements like Myaungmya, Khepaung, and Bassein. Famine in the south was the result (Fernquest 2006a, 18; SL 120). A cultural protocol or norm, discussed in detail in a later section, was to bring warfare to a halt during the rainy monsoon season. At this point in the narrative of Rajadhirat, we see a strategic violation of this protocol, leading to famine on the enemy side and a renewed advantage on the battlefield.

After the main theater of warfare moved south to the delta region, stretching Ava's supply lines. Ava occasionally faced problems supplying its troops with food once the conflict moved into Lower Burma proper. Encamped at Khepaung in 1415, soldiers were forced to eat yams and tubers. The commander Prince Minyekyawswa faced the choice of destroying his warboats and marching back north by land or confronting the Pegu side in a naval battle. Pegu drove stakes into the river to prevent boats from traveling south and disrupted Ava's food supply lines along the Irrawaddy to the north at Henzada. Ava forces sent south to free up the supply fought with Pegu forces trying to cut it off (SL 130-131 cited in Fernquest 2006a, 19)

In summary, from 1405 to 1411, battles were often fought over food supply enabling supply lines around Prome. After 1411, Ava had largely overcome its supply line difficulties in the middle Irrawaddy Basin and the fighting permanently moved southwards from Prome down the river and into the delta area to such settlements as Bassein, Myaungmya, Hmawbi, and Dala.

Long-term historical geography of Lower Burma

An inferior ecology, insofar at least as human habitation was concerned, meant that Pegu could only field a smaller army than Ava. Since, over long periods of time, military success is highly correlated with military manpower advantages, Ava ultimately prevailed in the north-south conflict over the important middle Irrawaddy region. Control over this stretch of river not only provided access via boat to the coast and ports such as Bassein, possession of this territory also augmented Ava's food supply and guaranteed access to this food supply via boat. However, the localized geography and adverse terrain of Lower Burma meant that Ava was not able to assert permanent control over Lower Burma, with Tharrawaddy along the Irrawaddy river being the military outpost furthest south that Ava was able to establish.

The two-fold division of Burma's geography into an upper and lower part makes it sound like there is a well-defined boundary between the two regions. There was actually a gradual ecological transition between Upper and Lower Burma along the Irrawaddy River. Upper Burma is usually characterized as a "dry arid zone" and Lower Burma as a wet "inland coastal zone," but:

Between the two zones lies a subdeltaic strip. Historically, however this area was always subject to one of the major zones, usually the north, and never exercised control over the central basin (Lieberman 1984, 17, footnote #3).

Important settlements were spread out along the whole length of the Irrawaddy River Basin, both to the north and the south of Prome: [Danubyu-Henzada-Kanaung-Myanaung]-Prome-[Thayet-Myede-Malun-Magwe]-Sagu-Salin. The bulk of the Ava-Pegu War as depicted in the Rajadhirat epic is fought over these settlements to the south and north of Prome. Later in the war, explicit reference is made to the segment of the Irrawaddy north of Prome. During fighting in Prome, Rajadhirat sent boats to collect rice from the Myede-Thayet-Magwe-Malun area. With this explicit reference, we can surmise that this group of settlements stood out in the minds of elites of the era as a distinct rice-producing area.

The Irrawaddy River to the immediate north and south of Prome constituted a critical juncture point between three regions: Upper Burma, Lower Burma, and Arakan. The Prome stretch of the Irrawaddy was particularly vulnerable to intrusions from Arakan and riverine watch posts near Prome by tradition performed essential garrison duties (Trager and Koenig, 1979, 136-138).

Military expeditions sent along the Irrawaddy to Lower Burma shifted from the Irrawaddy River to the Hlaing River around Prome for all destinations save Myaungmya or Bassein, the only large settlements in the delta. After Myanaung the Hlaing River branching to the east to Tharrawaddy, Hmawbi, Dagon, and up the Pegu River to Pegu, was a more important stretch of river militarily than the main artery of the Irrawaddy that passed through Henzada to the delta.

Henzada did not lie on the main line of communication between the kingdoms of Pegu and Ava...the line of march for invading armies lay either via the Toungoo valley, and the Sittang, or more often *down the Irrawaddy as far as below Prome, and then down the Hlaing stream – in those days an outlet of the main river* – in order to avoid the high waves of the lower reaches of the Irrawaddy. Nor was it in the direct route between Arakan and Ava, or Pegu (Morrison 1963, 16).

The crossover point from the Irrawaddy to the Hlaing River for military forces could actually have been anywhere from the Nawin River junction above Prome to Myanaung south of Prome, making the whole Prome stretch of the Irrawaddy essentially one large river junction between Upper and Lower Burma. In its

upper reaches near Prome the Hlaing River is known as the Myitmaka River. During the British colonial era there was uncertainty about the source of the Myitmaka River. The nature of the river changed during Monsoon season flooding which made it difficult to map. In an early British map “there was shown a connection between the Nawin [River] above Prome and the head of the Myitmaka, which was accordingly supposed to receive flood-water from the former river.” Military expeditions more likely shifted from the Irrawaddy to the Myitmaka at some point to the south of Prome:

[South of Prome] there are many channels by which the flood-waters of the Irrawaddy find their way into the Myitmaka or those of the Myitmaka into the Irrawaddy according to the relative heights of flood in the two rivers at the time. The highest connection of the Myitmaka with the Irrawaddy is the Singaung creek which is navigable only during the rains, and joins the latter some forty-five miles above the origins of the Bassein river (Perkins 1959, 6).

Tharrawaddy, Ava’s southernmost outpost during the Rajadhirat era, was located at the southern extremity of this area where the Irrawaddy joined the Hlaing River.

The settlements of the Irrawaddy River Basin appear to have been critical or pivotal strategically insofar as the possession of their food supply was essential for victory in warfare. In general, food supply likely formed the principle military objective given the premodern agrarian nature of the economy. In a similar riverine geographical context of the Northwest Coast American Indians, Ferguson (1984) has argued that contact with the West brought trade opportunities and weapons. During a pre-contact period, such as the Rajadhirat period, the objective of warfare was largely subsistence resources such as food supply. In the post-contact period, the objective shifted to the control of trade and waterways used for trade using firearms.

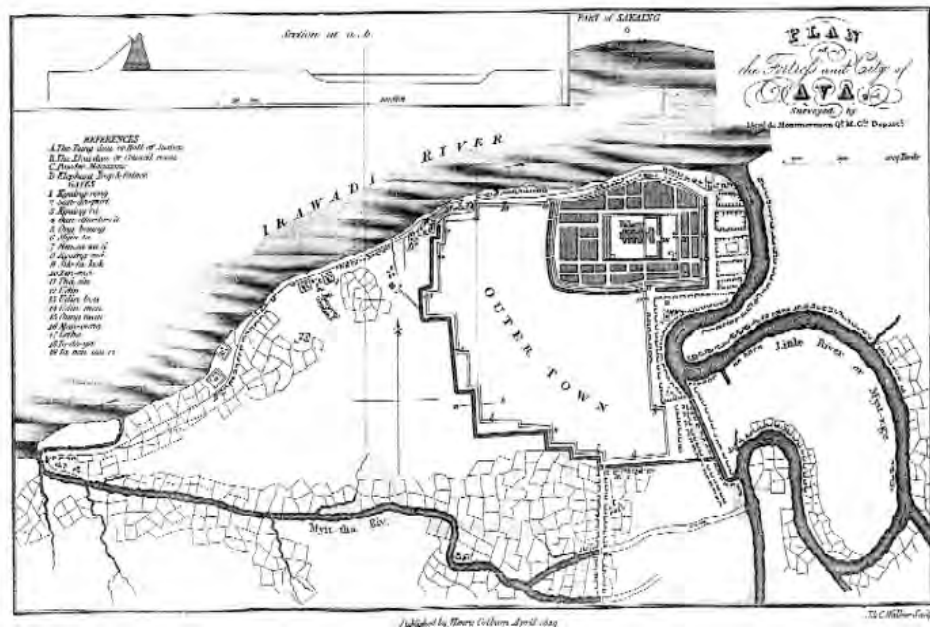


Figure 4 – Capital of Ava at river junction to Kyaukse granary

Control of resources depended on control of critical transportation junctures such as ports, river mouths, river junctions, or crossroads. The capital of Upper Burma, Ava, was well placed at a river mouth leading into the principle Kyaukse granary and being on the Irrawaddy, had relatively quick access to all settlements along the Irrawaddy River Basin. (See figure 4 for a map of the critical river junction that Ava is located at; Aung-Thwin (1990) includes maps of the Kyaukse and neighboring granaries).

To maintain access to the Irrawaddy River basin and Lower Burma possession of settlements along the Irrawaddy were of critical importance. To the southeast, transportation and access to Yamethin, Toungoo and Sittaung from Ava became progressively more difficult because it required overland transportation which made these settlements good protected locations during periods of political discord in Ava, for instance during the post-Shan invasion Min-gyi-nyo era. (Fernquest, 2005b, 88-89) The port town of Bassein may have been an instance of a post-contact armed strategic trade junction. When Rajadhirat first attempted to take the town early in the war “sailing ships manned by foreigners ...fired their weapons at them causing much casualties.” (Fernquest 2006a, 8) Bassein stands out in Table 3 for its wealth and statistics circa 1580 of course. However, Tomé Pires mentions Bassein as an important trade port much earlier (Cortese 1944).

Settlements along the lower subdeltaic stretches of the Irrawaddy Basin may have also been important for Upper Burma as sources of wild elephants. The ecology of Lower Burma appears to be better adapted than arid Upper Burma for sustaining a thriving elephant population (Charney 2007). The Kings of Ava traveled southwards to Lower Burma when they went elephant hunting as Mingyiswasawke did in 1391 at Tharrawaddy (UKI: 458).

In summary, an important region in Lower Burma, the Irrawaddy delta, was ecologically disadvantaged compared to Upper Burma. The carrying capacity in terms of military manpower that could be

supported, was less in the delta than it was in irrigated Upper Burma. Mobility in the delta was low since the terrain of the delta, consisting of innumerable small canals and creeks as well as marshlands difficult to traverse (boat, elephant, and horse, being successively more difficult modes of transportation, see Charney 2007, 8). The delta also contained key settlements that were arrayed east to west against the north-south flow of the Irrawaddy River making travel, communication, and coordination of these settlements perhaps more difficult than the main settlements of Upper Burma arrayed along the length of the Irrawaddy. Some sub-regions of Lower Burma such as the trans-Sittang literal which stretches from the mouth of the Sittang River down past Martaban and Moulmein were less accessible and vulnerable to military expeditions from Upper Burma using the rapid conduit of the Irrawaddy, whereas the Irrawaddy delta, because Upper Burma could transport forces there so quickly, was highly vulnerable. These three important ecological factors of carrying capacity, terrain-mobility, and connectivity posed constraints on premodern warfare and state formation.

In premodern Burma, the Irrawaddy delta region of Lower Burma had several characteristics, several of them limiting as far as agricultural production, food supply, and population were concerned:

Table 3: Delta Agricultural Ecology

Delta Ecology
a. Greater rainfall
b. Land in the delta was difficult to bring into cultivation due to seasonal flooding, swamps, heavy alluvial soils, saline water and soil
c. Malaria endemic, became epidemic in newly cleared jungle areas
d. Small urban populations, sparsely populated, small scattered hamlets
e. Patches of low-yield shifting paddy cultivation in clearings
f. Fishing, salt-boiling, fruit cultivation, and the collection of wild forest items such as resin, ivory, and honey were important for the local economy at this time

(Grant 1933, 1, 7; cited in O'Connor 1995, 972; Frasc 2002, 62; Lieberman 1984, 17-18, citing ZOK, 41, 50-51, 55, 58, 59; ROB 10, 13; Lieberman 2003, 131; note also that the Lower Delta of Siam also suffered from these ecological constraints, Bray 1986, 96)

The agricultural practices employed in the delta by Mon farmers, could be characterized as “flood managing” garden farming in contrast to the “flow managing” farming of irrigation adopted by the Burmese in Upper Burma (O'Connor 1995, 970, 972). Flood farming makes use of a river delta's given hydrological environment:

The exposure of this expanse of low flatland to a monsoon cycle of rainfall and drought gives the delta a highly distinctive hydrological environment. In the rainy season the delta receives not only *in situ* rainfall but also water flowing in from upstream. Because the delta has virtually no slope, this water cannot immediately drain away but accumulates steadily (Takaya 1987, 7).

As water accumulated, flooding resulted. During the dry season, the situation reversed and all the water disappeared making habitation difficult:

In the rainy season, there is no dry land; in the dry season, there is no drinking water. For these reasons, deltas were, until very recently, considered unfit for human habitation. Rather, they were left as grassland with patches of swamp forest, the domain of elephants and crocodiles (Takaya 1987, 7-8).

Cultivators in Lower Burma had to deal with this delta hydrological environment as best as they could. Rice cultivation on the delta's floodplain required managing flooding through drainage or by the selection of fast-growing varieties of rice suitable to this environment (Ishii 1978, 18). Only later on, during the British Colonial Period, was the rice-growing potential of Lower Burma's greater rainfall harnessed, after which Lower Burma quickly became the center for rice production in Burma (Adas 1974).

How much more flood farming was employed in Lower Burma compared to other regions in Mainland Southeast Asia can be seen in this table:

Table 4: Ratio of flood farming to irrigation farming (O' Connor 1995; cited by Lieberman 1991, 100)

	<i>Western Mainland (Burma)</i>	<i>Central Mainland (Thailand)</i>
<i>Upper/North</i>	1 / 3	1
<i>Lower/South</i>	27	3

This diagram indicates that Lower Burma had twenty-seven times as much flood farming as irrigation farming, whereas Lanna had an equal balance and the southern Chaophraya near Ayutthaya had about three times as much. Arid Upper Burma stands out with the reverse situation with three times as much irrigation as flood farming.

Flood farming is associated with low carrying capacity of land, that is land that can only support a lower population. The carrying capacity of an area of land is defined to be the number of people that the area of land can support given the quality of the natural environment and the level of farming technology of the population residing on the land (Turchin 2003, 52-53, 120-122; Zubrow 1975).

In general, an increase in irrigated rice farming technology relative to flood farming would increase productivity, which would in turn increase carrying capacity (Bray 1986, 62-63). Based on the predominance of flood farming, Lower Burma had a lower carrying capacity and was not as suited as Upper Burma was for supporting a large population and building up large armies, at least until the situation changed in the colonial period.

Evidence for a manpower advantage of Upper Burma over Lower Burma is mixed. There is evidence that the manpower and animal power of Upper Burma mobilized for warfare was somewhat numerically stronger than Lower Burma. The Burmese chronicle (Kalà) contains troop and animal counts for some campaigns during the Ava-Pegu War. Among all the expeditions covered in the chronicle, only a few provide directly comparable data for both sides. Relative comparative resource counts are probably more meaningful than absolute values since absolute values seem to have undergone exaggeration and amplification (Charney 2003; Lieberman 2003b). The data below indicates that there were notable and fluctuating disparities in military resources, disparities that usually favored Ava and Upper Burma. In the statistics below, “(E:200, H:3000, S:50000)” means “200 elephants, 3000 horses, and 50,000 soldiers.” In the row labeled “advantage” below, a positive number (“+”) means a numerical advantage for Ava and a negative number (“-”) means a numerical advantage for Pegu.

Table 5:**Comparison 1: 1405 (UKI: 489)****Pegu and Ava fight in Prome**

State	Elephants	Horses	Soldiers
Ava	200	3,000	50,000
Pegu	100	8,000	40,000
Advantage	+100	-5,000	+10,000

Comparison 2: 1408 (UKI: 519-520)**Ava marches to Pegu (UKI: 516-521)**

State	Elephants	Horses	Soldiers
Ava	800	20,000	200,000
Pegu	200	3,000	80,000
Advantage	+600	+17,000	+120,000

Comparison 3: 1411 (UKII: 6)**Pegu marches to Arakan**

State	Elephants	Horses	Soldiers
Ava	300	3,000	80,000
Pegu	50	200	50,000
Advantage	+250	-2,800	+30,000

Comparison 4: 1418 (UKII: 43)**Pegu marches to Toungoo**

State	Elephants	Horses	Soldiers
Ava	300	4,000	80,000
Pegu	350	1,000	70,000
Advantage	-50	+3,000	+10,000

Died: 3000 Mon, 30 elephants, 50 horses

Lower Burma's ecological constraints made three realities likely over the long-run, here presented as hypotheses. The first likely reality is that Lower Burma's lower carrying capacity probably put the region at a long-run military disadvantage compared to all neighboring regions (Upper Burma, Chiang Mai [Lanna], Ayutthaya). The second is that North-South differential in the flood-farming ratio was much greater in Burma than in the Central Mainland (modern Thailand). In the long-run this may have translated into the greatest differential in carrying capacity, explaining why Upper Burma usually dominated Lower Burma in warfare whereas warfare between Ayutthaya and Lanna was more evenly matched and inconclusive (c. 1350-1550).

The third is that the lower carrying capacity of Lower Burma may have translated into a lower population density that put Lower Burma at a disadvantage militarily vis-à-vis the Central Mainland (Chiang Mai, Ayutthaya). This may also have served as a magnet drawing elite migration from neighboring regions, for example, from Haripunjaya after a cholera epidemic (Swearer, Premchit & Bodhiransi 1998; Wheatley 1983, 199-102; Coedes 1960, 235; 1966, 116), or in the beachhead established by the Sukhothai merchant Magadu (Wareru) (SL 2-7; Griswold & Prasert 1972, 311-314). Lack of military manpower may have made Lower Burma a target for periodic military expeditions, including those against Martaban from Chiang Mai (c.1290) by Meng Rai (Wyatt & Wichienkeo, 1998, 36-37) and against Binnya U, Rajadhirat's father, in 1356 (Fernquest 2006a, 4; SL 11-13), and later during Rajadhirat's reign, against Martaban by Kamphaengphet (c.1411) (Fernquest 2006a, 17; SL 112-113).

The premodern settlements of Lower Burma, cited in historical works such as the Rajadhirat epic and Kalā's *Great Chronicle*, can be divided into largely autonomous local rice growing areas or bands (Lieberman 1984, 18, citing ZOK, 41) as in the following table.

Table 6: Five Rice Growing Areas

Rice Growing Area	<i>Settlements</i>
Subdeltaic	Danupyu, Henzada, Kanaung, Myanaung, Tharrawaddy
Western Delta	Bassein, Myaungmya
Central Delta	Pegu, Lagunpyi, Dagon, Dala, Khepaung, Hmawbi, Thanlyin
Trans-Sittang Literal	Martaban, Moulmein, Taikkala, Wun
Tennaserim	Mergui, Tavoy

The five bands of settlements of Lower Burma were arrayed down the Irrawaddy from Prome down to the delta and across to the east and then down the Martaban literal, in a large S-shaped pattern.

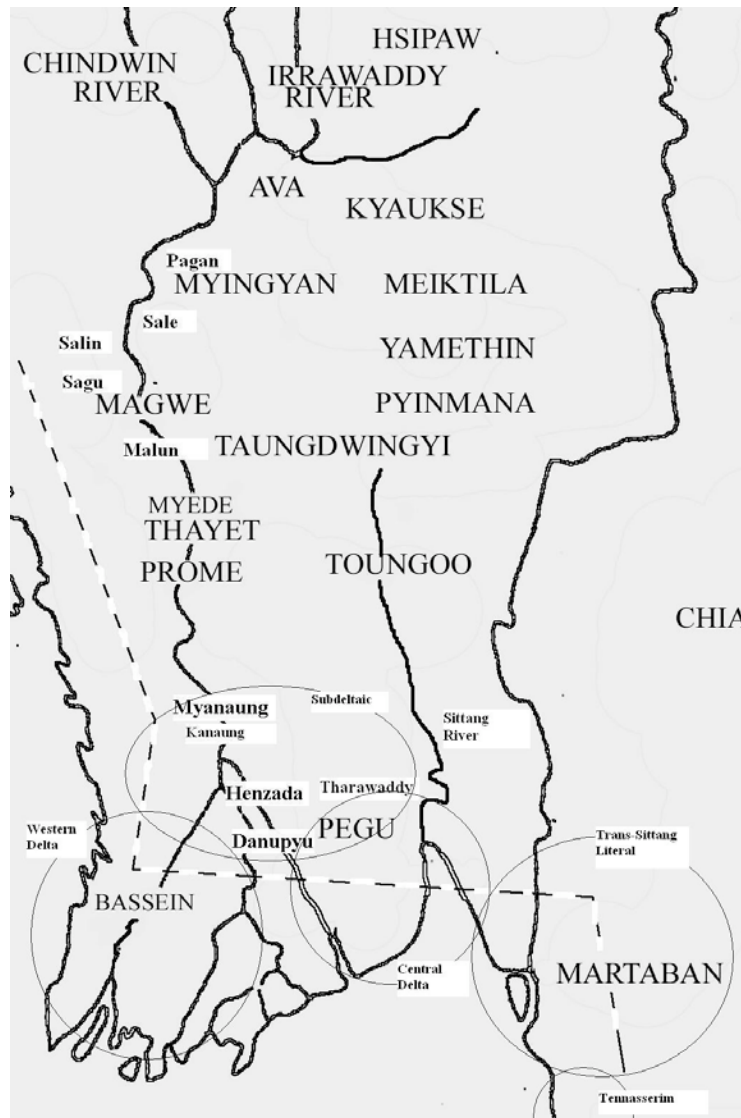


Figure 5: Irrawaddy River Basin

Geography made each of the five bands separate, distinct, and largely autonomous. This means that before Rajadhirat came to power, Lower Burma was likely characterized by a strong localism. In other words, before Rajadhirat's consolidation (c. 1383-1390) there were five divided, not one unified, political centers of power in Lower Burma. The fact that the main rivers and transportation arteries of Lower Burma ran north to south meant they ran against the grain of Lower Burma's east to west distribution of settlements, from Martaban north to Dagon west to Bassein north to Myanaung. This made transportation and communication between localities and unified rule more difficult:

...although Pegu, located in the center of Ramanya controlled the chief port, significant entrepôts also operated at Bassein, Martaban, and Tavoy, each of which retained its own courts, urban pagodas, and traditions of sovereignty. *Absent an east-west riverine artery, the dispersion of these port cities favored a localism almost as pronounced as the dry zone split between Ava, Prome, and Toungoo* (Lieberman 2003, 131; my italics).

Population distribution over Lower Burma's settlements was probably fairly even. The earliest tax census records for Lower Burma only date from 1580 at the end of King Bayín-naung's reign (r. 1551-1581). These records show concentrations of manpower at the capital and administrative center of Pegu as well as at Bassein, a prominent port center for trade, and a relatively equal distribution of the rest of the population across the other settlements:

Table 7: Lower Burma settlements, Manpower strength (c. 1580) (ZOK 41; Than Tun 1995, 4)

Settlement	Households	To Median
Pegu	9883	16.12
Bassein	6280	10.24
Henthada	889	1.45
Dagon	771	1.26
Ba Daung	667	1.09
Moulmein	663	1.08
Dala	640	1.04
Khepaung	587	0.96
Myaungmya	583	0.95
Thanlyin	583	0.95
Danupyu	529	0.86
Hmawbi	520	0.85
Kudut	493	0.8
Thayesi	482	0.79
Thamyindon	456	0.74

[Notes: ein-chei = collection of houses = households; to median = ratio of households in a settlement to households in the median settlement]

Rajadhirat indicates in several places that localism in Lower Burma was a deep-rooted feature that probably dated from before Rajadhirat's rise to power. First, the displacement of Binnya U, Rajadhirat's father, from Martaban to Pegu and the defense of the city state he built there from attacks by Martaban is evidence of the political divisions among several manpower weak settlements in Lower Burma before the period of the Rajadhirat epic (Fernquest 2006a, 4-5). Diamond describes a similar process in Mayan warfare as "power shifting" from settlement to settlement under the pressures of warfare (Diamond 2005, 165, 171). Second, the unwillingness of most settlements in Lower Burma to submit to Rajadhirat after his challenger to the throne

of Pegu, Smin Baru, was defeated is also evidence of political fragmentation and localism. The local lords of Lower Burma apparently did not accept a sovereign center in Pegu as being a natural state of affairs. The local Lower Burma ruler Laukpya shows independence of action when he realigns himself several times during Rajadhirat's succession crisis with different political actors. An extreme example is perhaps that of the ruler of Wun who manages to put off submitting to Rajadhirat three times (Fernquest 2006a, 7).

The frequently localized nature of warfare in the Rajadhirat chronicle also supports the model of Lower Burma's population being distributed uniformly among settlements with a large concentration at the capital Pegu presented above. Much of the fighting in the epic takes place in direct attacks by Ava on smaller settlements in Lower Burma that must have been defended by smaller local militias at each settlement. This is typically what happens when Ava is able to penetrate deep into the Delta during periods of Peguan weakness. When Rajadhirat is able to muster a large force from Pegu augmented with troops levies from other settlements, he typically meets Ava in advance on the approach to Lower Burma at settlements along the Irrawaddy or the Sittang Rivers.

The difficult nature of terrain in the delta made transportation and moving troops more difficult, which also accentuated localism. The vast deltaic plains that stretch from the Irrawaddy to the Sittang Rivers were intersected by creeks and channels with waters running through them that ebbed and flowed with the tides of the sea (Cheng Siok-Hwa 1968, 22). The all-pervading nature of the creeks and canals can be seen in Figure 6 below which depicts the deltaic plains from Bassein, on the upper left, to what was Dagon and Dala (on map, Rangoon), on the upper right. The terrain of the deltaic plains made travel difficult for forces with elephants, horses, and bullock carts and favored riverine warfare using boats that could navigate quickly through canals and creeks avoiding detection. This can be seen in the fighting along creeks and canals frequently depicted in *Rajadhirat* (Fernquest 2006a, 18-20).

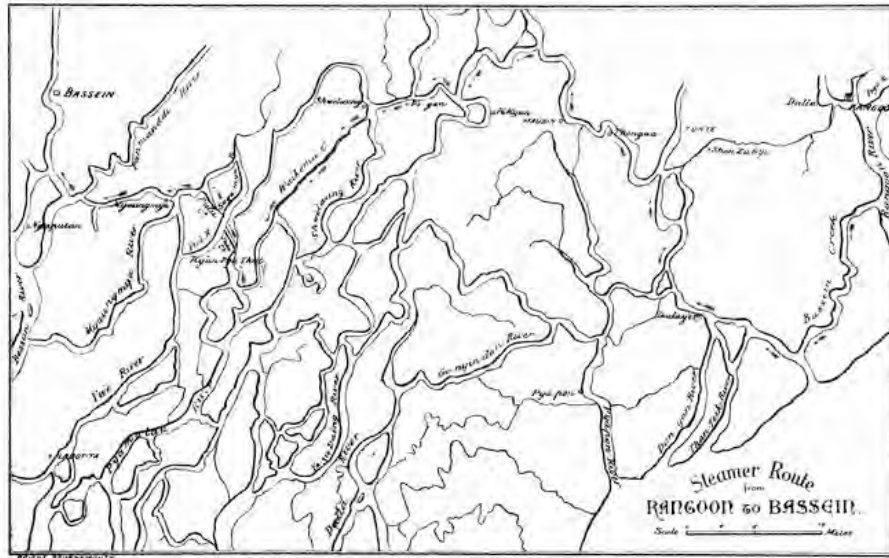


Figure 6: Creeks and Canals of the Irrawaddy Delta

Ultimately, warfare overcame the inherent localism or local autonomy of Lower Burma's geography. As Rajadhirat consolidated political power over Lower Burma he obtained concentrations of manpower and animal power that were comparable to Ava.

Long-term Ecological Patterns Influencing Warfare in the Burmese Agrarian State

Periodic subsistence crises broke the most fundamental link in the ecological chain (figure 2), the link between food supply and manpower. A classic example is a change in weather leading to a bad harvest. A food supply inadequate to feed the population of a settlement led to starvation and famine. Scorched earth tactics in warfare destroyed a locality's food supply and precipitated a mini subsistence crisis and this became a part of military strategy.

Some idea of what "food supply" entailed can be gained from the list of supplies Rajadhirat sent to Dala after he broke Ava's siege of the town. The supplies sent included food as well as armaments and tools: "rice husked and unhusked, salt, preserved fish, areca nuts, betel leaf, tea, rattan, bows, cross-bows, bowstrings, arrows, adzes, axes, swords, shields, helmets, spears and lances, jingals, cannon and firearms" (SL 137). A food supply for feeding war animals such as the horses and elephants, so ubiquitous in the troop lists of the Burmese chronicle, is notably absent from the above list, leading one to speculate how elephants and horses were fed in the context of Lower Burma. Elephants perhaps were left to forage in their natural jungle

habitats adjacent to villages, as Kautilya's Arthashastra suggests (Charney 2007 addresses this question for horses).

The premodern agrarian state went through subsistence cycles similar to the modern business cycle. War, famine, and disease, the three "specters," rather than the modern economic recession or depression, characterized the low point of the cycle. So far back in history does this cycle go that the three specters were known as the "four horsemen of the apocalypse" (famine, disease, war, conquest) in the Book of Revelations of the Bible. Three of the four elements (war, famine, epidemic) were also identified as important destructive factors in the Pali Buddhist texts describing successive creations and destructions of the world (kappa). Kalā's *Great Chronicle* borrows these elements for its narrative of the beginning of history (UKI: 2-8). All four elements had a tendency to arise simultaneously. The world historian Braudel called this historical coincidence of famine and disease the "old biological regime." An exogenous ecological shock initiated a subsistence crisis, which set the cycle in motion with a demographic downturn. The classic case of a subsistence crisis was climate (environment) affecting harvests (agriculture) affecting food supply, which in turn affected mortality rates:

In pre-industrial Europe the death rate and the birth rate seldom diverged greatly. In normal years the birth rate was slightly higher, and on average, and in the long run, pre-industrial Europe was characterized by a slowly growing population. However, with sad regularity weather anomalies, such as droughts, wet summers, and prolonged or late frost, would lead to harvest failures. If a harvest failure was widespread, it could easily turn into a famine, thus causing a so-called subsistence crisis. During such a crisis the usual relationship between birth and death rates would be reversed, and as more people died than were born, the total number of people dropped. This is the narrow definition of a subsistence crisis (Boomgard 2002, 1).

The mortality associated with warfare was not just the battle casualties we normally think of, death from starvation and disease was also a natural outcome of military strategies:

The third specter, often to be found in the company of dearth and disease, was war. War, of course, killed people directly, but the number of *indirect victims* was probably larger. Armies often *lived off the land*, which provided fertile soil for poverty and malnutrition to take root in the areas concerned, which opened the door to higher rates of morbidity and mortality. Sometimes, *standing crops were deliberately destroyed*. At the same time, armies brought epidemics, even when they did not *plunder or burn the crops*. The soldiers themselves, and the townspeople they *besieged*, frequently *fell ill*, owing to lack of good and sufficient food, clean water, hygiene, and to living in cramped conditions (Boomgard 2002, 1; my italics).

In fact, sometimes the coincidence of warfare, harvest failure, and famine had a strategic dimension to it:

...one should consider the possibility *that wars were caused or at least precipitated by crop failures*. What better time to start a war than when your adversary is crippled by a famine? Or, should a harvest failure loom, why not wage war on your neighbour whose crops are in better shape in order to fill your own barns anyway? (Boomgard 2002, 1, my italics).

It has been proposed since the time of Malthus that population pressure is a major causative factor behind warfare. Since crop failures caused population pressure, essentially making land unable to support the population that had grown to live on it (reduced carrying capacity of the land), crop failures would also have to be ranked as a causative factor behind warfare. Recently many have begun to question whether the lines of causality are that simple. Population pressure only leads to warfare under certain conditions (Turchin & Korotayev 2006, 1-2). Human political agency acting through warfare certainly changes those conditions and can make food supply effectively a weapon of warfare, and this is what seems to be happening in Rajadhirat as the conflict reaches a crisis point in the middle stretch of the Irrawaddy from 1408 to 1415.

A reliable and abundant local food supply was a precondition for military power. While ample food supplies sustained soldiers on expeditions to remote and distant military targets, they also strengthened the defenses of settlements and increased their ability to resist and survive incursions into dependent territory. Destroying or stealing local food supplies was an important part of offensive strategy, weakening an enemy's defenses and making it less able to support military manpower and wait out sieges.

Warfare was by no means a deterministic enterprise though. Food supply advantages could suddenly reverse. An aggressor forcing starvation within city walls or a stockade, could quickly be forced into starvation themselves. Consider the example of Rajadhirat's 1401 siege of Prome. According to Rajadhirat's minister Byat Za, Prome could only be won by waiting it out and forcing starvation inside the walls of the town. After a period of time, Prome's inhabitants were forced to live on starvation rations of rice bran and the pith of toddy palm, but when Ava broke the siege, winning Prome back, the situation was reversed and the Pegu side in turn faced a food supply problem. Couched as advise from Rajadhirat's minister Byat Za:

...since they had been subsisting on the environs of Prome and King Minhkaung had only come with rations carried by porters it would soon be used up and it would be necessary to provision himself by drawing on supplies from the Ava-Pegu region. 'When the environs of Prome face famine we will win,' he said 'The Burmese King will see the point as well as I do. Therefore, do not negotiate with him when he asks for a truce. With three to four hundred boats and picked men led by nobles we will see that rice from the Myede-Thayet-Magwe-Malun is collected and any amount remaining burnt and destroyed. The King approved of the plan so the scorched earth policy was carried out in every town and village in the area. As Minhkaung could not get his supplies from far or near he had to send an envoy by the end of ten days or so with gifts of two good horses and ten robes (SL 87-88; Fernquest 2006a, 11-12)].

Letters were exchanged and a temporary truce resulted from this strategy. A boundary line running east to west near Tharrawaddy divided the domains of Ava and Pegu. Shortly afterwards, Ava caught a group of thirty traveling northwards by horse towards Ava at a jungle checkpoint. Rather dubiously taken as a group of spies, Ava used this incident as grounds for breaking the truce (Fernquest 2006a, 12).

Evidence from global climate patterns points to the beginning of the Rajadhirat period (1383-1400) as a possible period of subsistence crises. During the late thirteenth and much of the fourteenth centuries what is known as the “Medieval Climate Anomaly” made higher summer rainfall and more reliable rice crops likely for Upper Burma:

...after 200-300 years of sustained demographic/agricultural expansion, Upper Burma society faced severe pressures whose origins were simultaneously institutional and ecological. Although Southeast Asia has long been regarded...as people scarce, land-rich environment, in this context *instability reflected less a shortage of people than of quality arable land* (Lieberman 2003, 121, also 102-103).

Towards the end of the fourteenth century this period likely came to an end resulting in shortages of water that:

...compounded Upper Burma’s problems by lowering yields on established cultivation, by withdrawing from cultivation marginal *taik* lands, many newly opened; and by helping to *shift the center of gravity to better watered districts farther south*. Besides threatening peasant living standards, such changes may have placed additional pressures on royal (as well as aristocratic and monastic) income, *intensifying factionalism at court and perhaps in the countryside* (Lieberman 2003, 121, my italics).

The conflict over the middle and lower Irrawaddy regions depicted in Rajadhirat may have been a record of exactly such conflicts over “better watered districts farther south.”

In Burma a cultural protocol or norm barred warfare during the rainy “monsoon” season, a protocol that can still be seen in operation today. *The Treasured Precedents*, a work on political theory dating from the Kòn-baung period, has a quite explicit statement of this principal:

Thus the time of Kahson [May] and Nayon [June] is no time for war; after a little comes the time when there are heavy rains. If you embark now on an expedition which will take you to the Talaing [Mon] king’s country, it will be one in which you will be beset with mud and mire, thorns and creepers, vines and bushes. All the rulers of all the villages, towns, strong places, and princedoms collect their revenues and receive their homage in the month of Natdaw [December] only. No one comes to pay taxes or to render homage until Natdaw and they always plan for and arrange their wars after the rain has stopped in Pyatho [January] and Tabodwe [February]. It is too late for warfare now (Bagshawe 1981, 109).

This passage emphasizes that the monsoon made the transportation and communication necessary in warfare difficult in muddy terrain (Charney 2004, 190-191). The manpower tied up in remote warfare was also needed for planting and harvesting during the monsoon season, essential for maintaining a food supply. The timing of non-farming tasks so that they did not conflict with the harvest time can be traced quite far back in history:

Archaeological and epigraphical evidence from Central Burma of the Pyu and Pagan periods shows that not only the digging of irrigation works but also non-rural tasks such as the construction of urban fortifications and monuments and even warfare, were *seasonal activities confined to quite specific periods of the year when they did not conflict with the demands of the cultivation cycle* (Stargardt 1992, 63; my italics).

In this respect, Burmese warfare resembled ancient Greek and Roman warfare, which halted by convention during the winter months when restricted freedom of movement made moving supplies and finding fodder for horses difficult (Sidebottom 2004, 76). “Alternating seasonality of cultivation and wars,” or just the “seasonality of warfare,” can be considered a widespread characteristic of premodern warfare (Ferguson (1999, 391). Furthermore, this feature of warfare distinguishes agricultural societies from prior social organizations such as hunter-gatherers: “agricultural society cannot be continuously at war. Unlike hunters and gatherers farmers do not have year-round leisure” (Coleman 1986, 30).

A cultural protocol or norm of seasonal warfare also leveraged existing manpower so that a higher fraction of the population could be mobilized for warfare, in what Andreski (1968, 232) calls a higher “military participation ratio” or MPR for a society, defined as “the ratio of military utilized individuals to the total able bodied population.” Higher manpower mobilization rates associated with higher rates of war success:

In the off-season, the large agricultural work force could do other work without endangering the food supplies. *Such a mobilization of peasant labor would make the scope for expansion of nonagricultural activities several times larger than if full-time labor had been used...*the share of total labor force which could be used in urban areas for purposes other than food production was seldom more than ten per cent. But if all or most of the peasant population could be mobilized in the off season [a high mobilization rate for only part of the year], it would become possible to have ten percent full-time workers, plus an additional 80-90 percent during perhaps one third of the year. The result for the year as a whole would be nearly 40 per cent of the work force performing non-agricultural work... (Boserup 1965, 80-81).

Higher war mobilization rates could also augment manpower by war captives taken after these successful campaigns:

What alternatives did rulers of urban societies have if labor services were—or became—insufficient to meet demand? They *could conquer additional areas settled with peasants [territorial expansion], or they could capture slaves to replace or supplement peasant labor services [raiding for manpower]* (Boserup 1965, 80-81).

A resurgent Ava likely overcame labor shortages partly by manpower raids on Tai settlements to the north, reversing the earlier pattern of Tai raids on Upper Burma.

The Rajadhirat epic provides anecdotal evidence of how important the harvest cycle and local control of manpower was in the timing of warfare. At the beginning of Rajadhirat's succession crisis the nobleman Zeip Bye (later used to provide to convey didactic points on taxation and bribery, see Fernquest 2006a, 13-14) was called upon by to pursue Rajadhirat after he had fled the dangers that awaited him at the capital Pegu during his succession. Zeip Bye objects that the monsoon had already arrived and his men were in their rice fields engaged with the harvest, so the time was not yet ripe for gathering them into a fighting force. By the time he could gather them into a fighting force, Rajadhirat would have already mobilized the population of Dagon (Yangon) where he was residing and prepared defenses. If Zeip Bye was defeated it would merely augment Rajadhirat's forces with men, if victorious, Rajadhirat would simply take flight northwards to Upper Burma or the Shan States to evade capture. (SL 30 cited in Fernquest 2006a, 5) Political control of manpower for both agricultural and military purposes was a local affair.

In summary, the need for crop success and a reliable food supply determined the seasonal rhythm and pattern of warfare in the Rajadhirat epic. If crop failure was sometimes an offensive objective, crop success was always a defensive objective. Offensives and campaigns usually lasted only during the non-monsoon fraction of the year (there were also breaks in the fighting for a year or two). There were of course strategic exceptions to these norms in the Rajadhirat epic, in which the intensity of campaigning was increased and Ava pitched camp deep in the Delta within enemy territory for the duration of the monsoon season in order to: 1. prevent the planting of crops thereby inducing famine and weakening the enemy, and 2. seize the offensive advantage when the rains came to an end.

The Short-term Ecological Dynamics of Warfare in the Burmese Agrarian State

Conflicts over the middle Irrawaddy found in Rajadhirat and Kalā's *Great Chronicle* share many features in common with premodern warfare in other societies throughout the world. One specific area of commonality is the dynamics of how kings conducted expansionary warfare.

First, premodern warfare exhibited an expansionary cycle with a “multiplier” or amplification effect, in which the accumulation of resources through expansionary warfare, including the taking of human captives, war animals, potential troop levies, tribute and taxation, enabled the further acquisition of resources.

Second, scorched earth tactics sought to assert control over an area by making the area uninhabitable, most commonly by attacking the food supply. Third, flight to mountainous forest hinterlands was a common response by local inhabitants to scorched earth tactics. Flight was possible if such a hinterland for refuge and resettlement existed, if the region was not environmentally “circumscribed” by a surrounding area of low carrying capacity that precluded flight. Given the existence of such a hinterland refuge, conquering states faced the problem of resettlement of a dispersed population after conquest, of drawing inhabitants back to their homes. Cutting a deal with local inhabitants could likely reduce the level of resources that the victor sought to extract from conquered regions, as a sort of social contract quid-pro-quo or bargain with local inhabitants for remaining in their settlements.

Before discussing these three elements of expansionary warfare dynamics and their relation to the narrative of Rajadhirat, an example of this cycle in operation in its contractionary phase is necessary. The example would rank as one of the most well-known in Southeast Asian history since it is taken from Ayutthaya-Burmese warfare which has been the subject of intense historical scrutiny in Thailand (e.g. Damrong, “Our Wars with Burma”). In Ayutthaya-Pegu warfare (c. 1581-1599) during the reign of Bayín-naung, expansionary warfare reached its height in premodern Burma. The contractionary overstretch phase of the geopolitical cycle kicked in during the reign of Bayín-naung’s successors. They failed to maintain the momentum of expansionary warfare and the subsequent contraction in domains and resources led to a subsistence crisis in Lower Burma during the 1590s (Lieberman 1984, 41, 97; Fernquest 2005). The Burmese chronicle version of the subsistence crisis is supported by independent European accounts that describe the same situation and events (Lieberman 1986, 240-247) Warfare increased manpower and food supply needs that agriculture could simply not keep pace with:

...constant campaigns placed an intolerable strain on the population of the Delta, the only area over which they exercised effective control...*the limited agricultural-demographic resources of the south [Lower Burma] meant it was particularly ill-suited to support continuous military expeditions.* Large numbers of cultivators were pressed into military and corvee service even during the growing season, and many who marched against Ayudhya and Vientiane never returned to till the fields. Despite the reduced population in the Delta, the government refused to reduce its demands for rice, corvee labour and military service – it probably increased demands of this nature during wartime – so per capita burdens on the remaining cultivators increased (Lieberman 1984, 39).

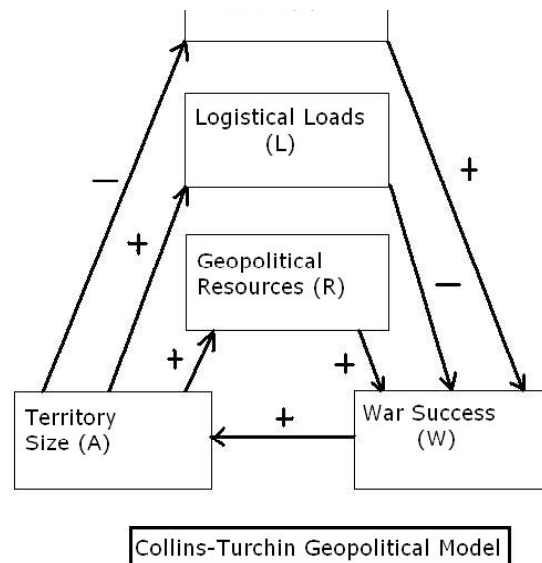
The end of war success in Burma’s expansionary warfare led to a contractionary spiral that worsened with each successive campaign, ultimately leading to famine and the complete collapse of the state centered at the capital of Pegu in Lower Burma.

From the simplified perspective of ecology, premodern warfare can be seen as a long-term competition between two agrarian states with each society’s geographical and ecological endowment forming

the initial conditions of the competition (Turchin 2003). Each of the competing states mobilizes its food surplus to engage in expansionary warfare. As the state expands it becomes increasingly difficult to mobilize the military and logistical resources necessary to maintain control over the state. The ability of a state to deal with supply line overstretch becomes a critical factor in sustaining expansion and avoiding contraction. Perdue (2005, 1996) provides a well-documented example of such supply line overstretch in Mongol-Qing Chinese warfare.

The ecological chain of causation in warfare was not a static one way influence, but rather a dynamic feedback loop, a repetitive cycle of environment affecting warfare and warfare in turn affecting the environment. Turchin's (2003) adaptation of the geopolitical model of Collins (1995) captures the essence of this cycle for expansionary warfare (figure 7).

Figure 7: Turchin-Collins Geopolitical Cycle of Expansionary Warfare



The link between manpower resources (part of R) and warfare success (W) in premodern warfare is a universally acknowledged causal connection. The link between manpower resources (part of R) and warfare success (W) in premodern warfare is a universally acknowledged causal connection. As Ferguson observes, “imperial expansion was based on the ability to martial overwhelming numbers” (Ferguson, 1999, 394). Besides raw population numbers, the intrinsic military participation rate (MPR) of a society, the percentage of the population of a state that could be mobilized for warfare also determined war success (Andreski, 1968; see section on seasonal warfare).

Table 8: Feedback sequences in the Geopolitical Model

Cycle	Period	Feedback
Expansion	1551-1581	W +A +R +W
		W +A +L -W
Contraction	1590s	W -A -R -W

Economics is perhaps the only social science that routinely verbalizes how events unfold according to theory in mathematical models. A contention of this paper is that this mode of explanation can be fruitfully applied to the premodern political economy of agrarian states. What follows is such a verbalization.

There are several positive and negative feedback loops embedded in this feedback mechanism. Initially, given overwhelming manpower resources, the impetus of war success (S) increased territorial size (A) and geopolitical resources (R), mainly a greater food supply, manpower, and animal power seized as plunder. Greater food supply and manpower in turn spurs more success in war, a counterintuitive phenomenon found in many premodern societies as noted by Jared Diamond (2005, 165) “Marchland position” in the geopolitical cycle is the advantage that “states with enemies on fewer fronts expand at the expense of states surrounded by enemies” (Turchin 2003, 17; citing Collins 1995, 1558). This means that increases in territory size can lead to war failure from “imperial overstretch” and having more frontiers to defend. The advantage goes to states expanding from an area easier to defend (Turchin 2003, 89).

Logistical load (L), the key negative feedback loop in the feedback mechanism, is defined to be the cost of providing a food supply to military expeditions in expansionary warfare against ever more remote targets. This cost of providing a military food supply included transportation costs and more importantly and unpredictably the cost of possible interrupted supply lines. Interrupted supply lines could induce a mini-subsistence crisis, as we have seen in the conflicts over the middle Irrawaddy. Logistical load increased with the distance of an expedition’s target, the ease of maintaining clear supply lines, and with the ability of fortifications to withstand assaults and force long sieges.

Scorched earth tactics destroyed local food supplies and weakened the defensive capabilities of the locality under attack (Charney 2004, 194-198; Fernquest 2006a, 11-12). From the perspective of the peasant commoner scorched earth tactics and manpower raids were unpredictable events that suddenly struck their settlement making them uninhabitable. For example, around 1415, just when it seemed peace and tranquility had finally returned to the area:

People from Bassein poured out from within the confines of the city walls thinking that the besiegers had gone away for good. They visited the gardens and parks savouring them when [suddenly] Minyekyawswa then at Kyet Kanet, sent warboats and other craft accompanying them to take captives. He also had coconut and betel nut plantations razed (SL 136 quoted in Fernquest 2006a, 20).

Explicit descriptions of scorched earth tactics are legion in the Rajadhirat epic and jump out at the reader from the page. Consider the following examples, “I have laid waste Tagaung-Male and put the countryside to torch but no one there dared lift a finger against me” (SL 83); “He then had the Thakycin stockade destroyed and the rice stocks burnt” (SL 95 cited in Fernquest 2006a, 14); “...since he had reached Burmese territory, he had confiscated all boats, taking the good ones, destroying and setting fire to those that were not. He would build a strong stockade for them and leave a reserve force of war boats to go after the enemy if they came out to forage” (SL 78); and “The invading Burmese troops set fire to every village they came across and butchered all the cattle they could lay their hands on” (SL 95 cited in Fernquest 2006a, 14). It is highly unlikely that inscriptions or independent sources in other languages such as the Chinese *Ming Shi-lu* will ever verify any of these precise details. In the last item, stealing local food supplies for personal use rather than the outright destruction of pure scorched earth would also seem more logical.

Even if these are fictional details, they likely reflect common practice in warfare rather than purely fictional propaganda. The horrors of war and their rather obvious violation of religious tenets were real. They echoed in premodern Southeast Asian fictional works. The Thai poem *Khum Chang Khun Paen*, for example, explains that

lingers on the consequences of war, especially the sorrow visited on the families of slaughtered soldiers, and the human devastation when a city is defeated, its population is swept away into slavery, and its *wealth dissipated by looting and distraint* (Baker & Pasuk, forthcoming).

Furthermore, because violent warfare practices such as scorched earth violated the tenets of organised religion, they were often excised from official royal court histories. There are also well-known examples from western history of destruction of an enemy’s food supply such as during the Peloponnesian wars of ancient Greek history (Hanson 2005, 35-64).

In defensive warfare, even before expeditionary forces arrived at their destination efforts were made by the settlements under attack to store away a food supply within the city walls or within a secure stockade as a defensive measure to wait out a siege and deny food supplies to the approaching enemy. How much could be stored away in this fashion depended on the timing of the campaign with respect to the beginning of the harvest season. As a last resort the destruction of crops that could not be conveyed to a safe place or harvested in time denied a food supply to the approaching enemy (Charney 2004, 195-198). Food shortages even sometimes necessitated the building of a separate stockade to protect the food supply from the hungry population protected within separate city walls (Fernquest 2006a, 16).

Flight from settlements to a safer less settled hinterland, often protected by forest and mountains, was a common response to expansionary warfare and scorched earth tactics. Environmental circumscription describes the conditions under which flight was chosen as a strategy by a locality attacked by an expanding state. Perdue (1996, 770) observes, “As they expanded their territories, the rulers faced the problem inherent

in the dialectics of conquest of land-based empires. Larger boundaries offered space for peasants to flee exploitation at the core by moving to the frontier (Perdue 1996, 770) As one military commander fighting the indigenous American Indians in 1675 complained: “Every swamp is a castle to them, knowing where to find us; but we know not where to find them!” (Parker 1996, 119) Or as the military historian Geoffrey Parker reflects: “...there are innumerable examples of colonial soldiers marching out with drums beating and colours unfurled in order to destroy an Indian ‘town’ – only to find it gone” (Parker 1996, 119).

Flight had advantages as a defensive strategy. Flight dispersed populations over territory and eliminated concentrated easy targets. If the carrying capacity of the land fled to was sufficient, subsistence from foraging or swidden rice farming would have been possible for long periods of time. Concentration of large numbers of people behind city walls or behind the defenses of a stockade, even if well-stocked with rice, ran the risk of unsanitary conditions leading to disease, a risk avoided by the dispersal of populations over territory by flight. In fact, the deep jungle and mountains might have been a healthier and more effective form of fortification.

Flight to the protective cover of the jungle is found in Rajadhirat. Early on, Zeip Bye responds to requests that he pursue Rajadhirat after the latter takes refuge at Dagon by observing that if Rajadhirat were to be victorious, Zeip Bye’s men would be captured, and this would only serve to augment Rajadhirat’s forces. If defeated, Rajadhirat would just flee northwards to Upper Burma or the Shan states to take refuge (SL30, Fernquest 2006a, 5). One can imagine Rajadhirat as a fugitive Mon lord resident at the court of Ava in Upper Burma much as Mingaung’s brother was a fugitive residing at the court of Pegu in Lower Burma later on.

Ruling elites accompanied with only a small band of followers also sometimes chose flight as a last-ditch survival strategy. One notable example of this elite flight occurs during Rajadhirat’s 1401 expedition against Prome, when the initial assault on the Irrawaddy Basin settlement of Tayokmaw failed, Rajadhirat laid siege to the town, but the ruler fled to the jungle. Rajadhirat decided to abandon the siege for the time being and move on to Prome, reasoning that after taking Prome, Tayokmaw would fall easily, and that this was a better strategy than pursuing the ruler into the jungle (Fernquest 2006b, 11, citing SL74). Two more examples of elite flight both take place in 1388 during Rajadhirat’s consolidation of power over Lower Burma following the succession crisis at Pegu of 1383. One was the flight of Laukshein ruler of Bassein, to Arakan around 1388 with “ten elephant loads of gold and silver.” The other was the flight of ruler of Wun after his delaying tactics failed (Fernquest 2006a, 8-9, 7).

Examples of flight as a strategy loom large in later periods of Burmese history. Setthathirat, King of Lanchang, later effectively employed the strategy of flight of the capital’s population to the jungle against the Bayín-naung. Repeated unsuccessful attempts to conquer Lan Chang met met this form of resistance over and over again over the better part of a decade (c. 1564-1574) (Lorrillard 1999; Aung Thein 1908, 1911-1919). In the end, Bayín-naung was forced to offer an amnesty to get local inhabitants to return to the Lan Chang capital. The Burmese in Nan faced the same problem much later (c. 1703-07) (Wyatt 1994; see next

paragraph). The Tais of “Mong Mao” in Yunnan also used the strategy of flight in response to Ming and Burmese inroads into their territory, a flight that precipitated a long pursuit that the Ming eventually handed over to the Burmese to complete (Fernquest 2006b, 61-66).

Ancient abandoned settlements in the Sri Lankan jungle may also attest to the universal nature of flight as a response to warfare:

...Thousands of ruined or abandoned tanks of smaller size were discovered in the wilderness...often within wide tracks of forest and jungle, but the villages which once stood near these tanks have disappeared, and the fields which were watered from them are overgrown with jungle...The reason which induced so many families to abandon their home and to settle in the wilderness were, were, no doubt, insecurity of life and property brought on by political disturbances...*many people were cruelly harassed and even often mutilated or killed by an undisciplined soldiery, their houses burnt, the cattle driven away as booty, the tanks breached, the weirs destroyed in the channels, and the fields and gardens devastated* (Geiger 1960, 51).

These jungle colonists were known as *vanni*. After warfare had subsided and the cause of their flight to the jungle had subsided, negotiations were held for their return from the jungle to settlements subject to state control in a temporary amnesty that resembles the Burmese amnesties in Nan and Lanchang cited above. The Burmese eventually treated those did not return as the enemy (Geiger 1960, 52).

Chinese history includes examples of flight. The Mongols used flight as a defensive strategy to stress Qing military supply lines (Perdue, 1996, 2005). Consider a situation in which the aggressor encountered effective resistance such as strong defensive preparations to withstand a siege (fortifications, manpower, stored food, flight). A common strategic response found in Burmese chronicle warfare was to attack neighboring settlements first to build up geopolitical resources such as manpower and animal power (see geopolitical cycle of figure 6), before returning to the initial target with renewed strength (Fernquest 2005b, 105-106, 110). One can see the Di Cosmo-Andreski model of incipient state formation as describing a similar process (Andreski 1968; Di Cosmo 1999; Fernquest 2005b, 122-124).

Certain conditions had to exist for the possibility of flight as a response to expansionary warfare. According to Carneiro’s well-known “environmental circumscription” model, an area of circumscribed agricultural land was bounded by marginal unproductive land in the jungle, a marshy area, or the mountains, for instance. More extensive cultivation of this marginal land would bring severely diminishing returns. If there is no environmental circumscription, then the weaker side in a conflict can migrate out from the region and settle somewhere else. If there is environmental circumscription, then the weaker side is forced to submit to the stronger side because flight and migration is not an option. The populations of the stronger and weaker (conquered and conqueror) are united. The new state thus formed may have then alleviate the new population pressure by gradually increasing the productive capacity of agricultural through more intensive cultivation using irrigation, multi-cropping, new seed varieties, or other techniques discovered through local

experimentation and diffusion (Carneiro 1970, 1978; Lewellen 1992). As we will see, flight to the protective cover of jungle was often only temporary.

Although flight was an effective response, this also entailed great costs for both those fleeing and well as those pursuing. First, once the population of the town had fled into the wilderness it was difficult to resettle the town. Second, after the enemy looted and laid waste to the town, the town would have to be rebuilt. The problems that ensued after Burma's subjugation and destruction of Nan in 1703 demonstrate the difficulties with resettlement. In 1703 the town of Nan was leveled and as the Nan chronicle writes "the only thing left of Nan was the land." Four years later, in 1707, the Burmese king appointed Noi In as governor because he had been able to persuade many of the town's inhabitants to return. Another invasion occurred, this time by Lansang and Vietnamese armies. Captives were taken and those who could, fled from the town. Again Nan was depopulated and again Noi In had to persuade the former inhabitants to return. To speed up resettlement the Burmese king had Noi In issue an order that attests to the difficulty of resettlement. The order offered an amnesty and compelled the former inhabitants "to rebuild the city and resume their farm work and rebuild dams and irrigation ditches. If any farm landowner refused to comply, his land would be worked by others, and the owner would have no right to reclaim his land" (Wyatt 1994).

Strategies of resettlement after flight, or even better, strategies to avoid flight in the first place, were a necessary part of waging expansionary warfare. To avoid the burden of luring inhabitants back to a settlement after attacking, looting, and plundering it, explicit orders were sometimes issued not to engage in looting and plundering. In the 1406-07 expedition to Arakan, Rajadhirat issued explicit orders not to plunder the area around Sandoway (Fernquest 2006a, citing SL 91-92). That Than Tun's *Royal Orders of Burma* contains a similar order by Thalun ordering respect for local inhabitants along the march path to Yunnan, shows that this was a constant concern of rulers (ROB 1, 82, 85-88).

Conclusion

So what are Southeast Asian historical texts? To returning to the initial question posed at the beginning of this paper, we can now see that they are a lot more than history in the traditional sense of the term.

The models outlined at the beginning of this paper stressed that historical events have multi-causal rather than mono-causal origins. The Aung-Thwin Lieberman debate of the early 1980s over the role of religious wealth accumulation in the failure and collapse of the premodern Burmese state provides a good example of the limited theoretical basis that Burmese and Southeast Asian history has often proceeded upon (Aung-Thwin 1979, 1980; Lieberman 1980). Aung-Thwin (1979) provided an essentially mono-causal explanation of Pagan's decline, stressing religious factors to the exclusion of secular factors. Aung-Thwin's theory held that the accumulation of resources such as land and agricultural labour by the Buddhist *sangha* was the critical cumulative drain on the Burmese agrarian state that led to its collapse.

The essence of Lieberman's critique was that a multi-causal explanation that places an *a priori* equal emphasis on secular factors as well as religious factors should be allowed for (Lieberman 1980, 756). This is in line with Vickery's (1998, 3-7) recent suggestion that the theoretical machinery from which historical hypotheses for Southeast Asia are drawn from should be more diversified (For examples see Burke 2005). Lieberman (2003), taking a comparative world history approach, dares to formulate exactly such cross-disciplinary hypotheses such as using economist Alexander Gerschenkron's notion of "economic advantage of backwardness" to explain how institutional innovation by Upper Burma's backward periphery may have allowed linear stages in development to be skipped. The borderlands between Upper Burma and Lower Burma are conjectured to have been a region of economic experimentation that evaded the debilitating economic traditions of the royal center at Ava (Lieberman 2003, 127; Gerschenkron 1962).

Two requisites seem fundamental to multi-causal explanations: disciplinary boundaries must be breached in the search for a multiplicity of alternative explanatory hypotheses, and more rigorous and falsifiable models must be presented that can be tested against the historical data, data which must be made publicly available so that other scholars can assess the model and possibly falsify it, something that never happened in the Aung-Thwin -- Lieberman debate mentioned above.

In a recent paper, Vickery (2003) argues commonly accepted truisms in Southeast Asian history need to be questioned more. That Southeast Asia during the premodern period was land rich and people poor in terms of absolute quantities of resources available, is a truism "should not be repeated like a mantra because it may not always be true" (Vickery 2003, 8).

Vickery instead poses the question: Land or people? This question can, in turn, be expanded into a multiplicity of different falsifiable hypotheses to be tested regarding the influence of ecology and demography on warfare and agriculture. Employing a shorthand to state the hypotheses, in the manner of economists, can make these hypotheses more clear. For example one hypothesis uncritically accepted by Aung-Thwin that Vickery drew attention to, can be expressed as: Low P, High L, that in general Southeast Asia was endowed with low population levels and abundant amounts of land. Other common hypotheses run as follows: population pressure on the limited amount of land in a state causes expansionary warfare: $P \Rightarrow E$, holding L fixed, or given a fixed amount of land, an increase in population leads to higher levels of expansionary warfare, a hypothesis that has been shown not to hold universally (Turchin & Korotayev 2006; Johnson & Earle 2000). The hypothesis that Vickery proposes to counter Aung-Thwin's hypothesis is the Boserup hypothesis that $P \Rightarrow I$, holding L fixed, increasing the population on a fixed amount of land leads to greater employment of irrigation and managed water supplies (Vella 1986, 95 citing Boserup 1965). The converse of the Boserup hypothesis is the Malthus hypothesis: $I \Rightarrow P$, namely an increase in irrigation leads inevitably to an increased food supply, and a catastrophic population increase resulting in famine. Another hypothesis might run: $W \Rightarrow P$, namely an increase in war success (W) leads to an increase in population (P) because the existing population of the conqueror is augmented with war captives. Again, Vickery criticizes Aung-Thwin for accepting this truism uncritically for all cases without evidence.

Andreski's (1968) work on the sociology of warfare, and particularly the flowchart that he uses to integrate many of his ideas, provides many more hypotheses on warfare that historians might pose for premodern agrarian states.

Fresh falsifiable hypotheses applicable to warfare and the premodern state can come from unexpected quarters. The work of Ferguson (1984) on the anthropology of warfare of northwest coast Indians in America compares patterns of conflict before and after contact with western traders armed with modern western firearms (precontact and post-contact periods). The advent of western traders shifted the objective in conflicts from acquiring resources that could be used for subsistence purposes in agriculture, such as land and manpower, to acquiring particular locations along trade routes essential to controlling these trade routes. This sort of multi-dimensional hypothesis that brings together several disparate elements, warfare, trade, geography, weapons technology, demography, agriculture, and contact with the west or China, has potential for providing more sophisticated post-Mandala or post-Galactic polity models of the premodern agrarian state in Southeast Asia.

Source criticism as an end in itself, debates sometimes failing to provide, in the end, any inkling of what might have actually happened (i.e. Rankean factual history). One can always end a paper with a cautionary note deferring final judgment until the day that further sources are uncovered, but what if such a wish list of UR sources never materializes?

What is needed, is rather reasonable hypothetical historical narratives of *what-might-have-happened*, most likely multiple instances of such narratives. Negative source criticism unaccompanied by positive statements of what might have happened, in the end produce a conjectural vacuum, an area of enquiry where there is seemingly no evidence at all, in which statements about *what-actually-happened* cannot be made with any degree of probability at all (See area D in the diagram below).

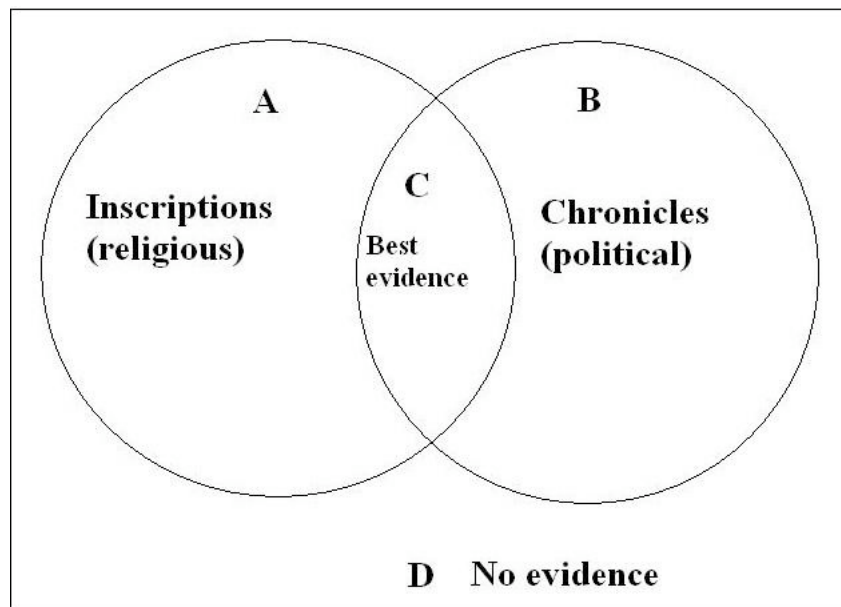
From the philosophy of science Bayesian inference is a useful paradigm that can inspire multi-threaded narratives of *what-might-have-happened* (Bird 1998). Reasonable assumptions derived from certain knowledge of similar premodern agrarian states can be introduced where hard evidence is not available. These assumptions can be introduced with certain subjective *a-priori* probabilities attached. The conjectural vacuum is then filled then, not with one master narrative, but rather multiple alternative narrative threads each of which stands as a possible explanation of *what-might-have-happened*. Following the model of Bayesian inference, the introduction of new evidence will lead to an update of *a-priori* probabilities and set of feasible narrative threads.

Different types of historical sources are useful for inferring historical facts regarding the three levels of infrastructure, structure, and superstructure. We can infer superstructure from inscriptions, which usually record religious donations. Indigenous historical chronicles also provide details of religious acts of merit and rituals at royal courts. We can infer structure from indigenous historical chronicles, royal orders, tax registers (*sittan*), as well as inscriptions. Warfare, in the diagram above, is also a part of this level. Infrastructure constitutes the long-run constraints that shape and constrain what can be achieved at the higher levels of

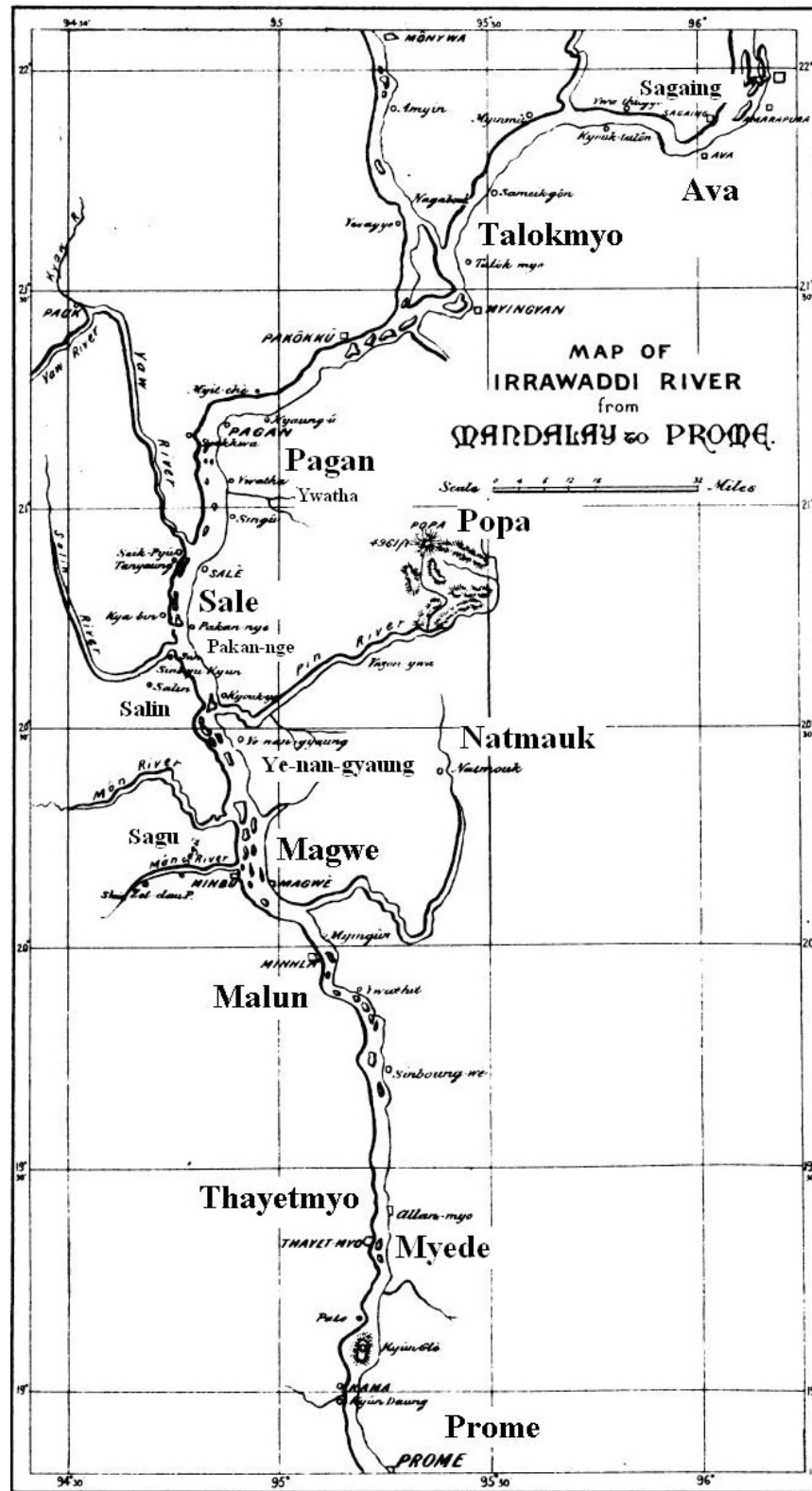
structure and superstructure. In the world of the premodern agrarian state “the conditions of land tenure, the nature of rural settlement, the type of crops, and human adaptations to environment to produce food are inseparable from how an army is recruited, organised, maintained and used” (Hanson & Strauss 1999, 440). Indigenous historical chronicles usually omit information at this level. Tax records and inscriptions can provide some evidence in this regard, but ultimately archaeology is necessary to uncover facts at this level. There are also many aspects of history that fall outside either type of evidence, which will necessarily be conjectural. Insofar as history consists of positive statements of what likely happened and not just the criticism and questioning of sources, historians must fill this conjectural vacuum.

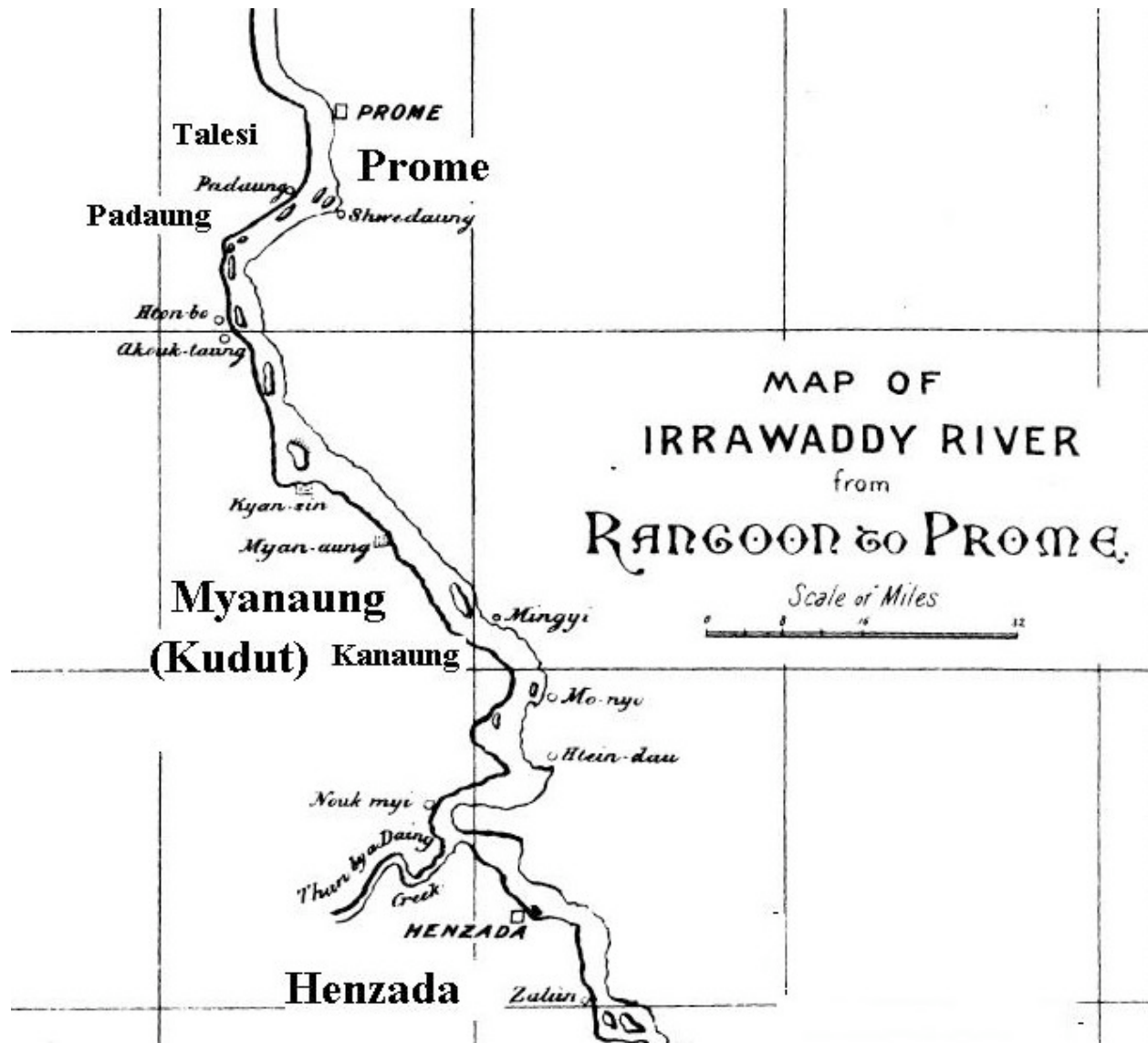
The diagram below summarizes the historical evidence available from indigenous historical sources, inscriptional and chronicle, employed by historians. Inscriptional evidence is mostly religious and chronicle evidence is mostly political. There is an intersection between the two types of evidence, often expressed as inscriptions verifying details in chronicles. Arguably, the most reasonable way to fill in this conjectural vacuum is to look at what was generally the case amongst all premodern agrarian states that faced similar circumstances. The influence of ecology on warfare in premodern agrarian states is one such domain with many commonalities investigated in this paper.

Figure 8.



Maps of the Irrawaddy





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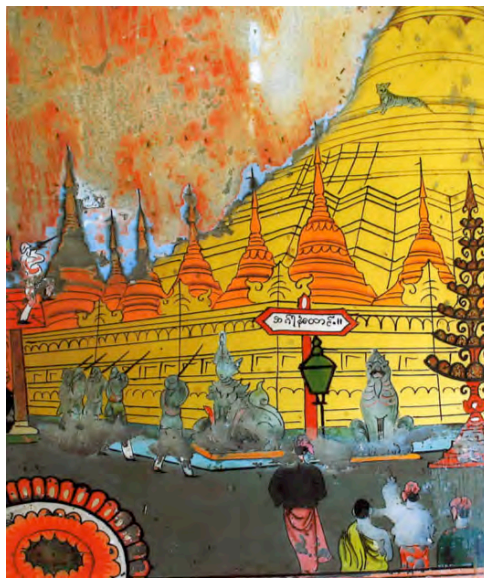
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A TIGRESS ON THE SHWEDAGON: A RESEARCH NOTE

Donald Stadtner brought the following piece of history regarding the Shwedagon to our attention and sent a photograph of glasswork that recorded the event, together with the text below from Walter del Mar, *The Romantic East: Burma, Assam, & Kashmir* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1906, 27-28). We reproduce it further below along with a detail of the glass painting, from a private collection in Yangon. The scene depicts the incident quite literally, with the soldier climbing "to the roof of one of the smaller shrines....." Although del Mar refers to the animal as a tiger, it was in actuality a tigress and the events discussed below occurred on 3 March 1903, the tigress having moved to the vicinity of the Shwedagon from Gyophu Lake.¹



“There is [a] story ... in relation to a tiger, which in some unexplained manner found its way into Rangoon, and sought refuge on one of the terraces of the base of the Shwe Dagon pagoda. Down rushed the monks and temple attendants in a panic to the fort below the pagoda and implored the soldiers to come up and kill the ferocious beast and so save them from a terrible death. After much difficulty and some danger the tiger was traced to its hiding place, and in order to get at him a soldier had to climb to the roof of one of the smaller shrines from which he killed the animal. Next day there was a great commotion. The very pongyis who had begged the soldiers to kill the tiger denounced them as wicked slayers of the temple’s nat or good spirit, and not only hung the skin over the spot where it was shot, but ultimately placed on the pagoda platform a plaster image of the tiger to be worshipped by the faithful and shown to the curious.”

¹ The Wildlife Conservation Society, “Historical Records of the Tiger in Myanmar Pre-1999,” Citing Colonel Hla Aung, *Large Animals of Cat Family*.

REVIEWS

Donald M. Seekins. *Burma and Japan Since 1940: From Co-Prosperity to Quiet Dialogue*. Copenhagen: NIAS. 2007.

Donald M. Seekins analyses Burma and Japan's relationship from Burma's colonial occupation to the post 1988 approach of "quiet dialogue" in a compact but all too brief book. These countries have ties which are atypical of relations between Japan and its other aid recipients or former colonies. Seekins refers to original Japanese language sources providing data on economic ties between the countries and cultural and historical articles that explore Japan's perception of Burma in its colonial history and the present day. Beginning with an extract from the controversial revisionist text *Atarashii Rekishi Kyokasho* [New History Textbook] that posits pre-war Japan's Greater East Asia policy as the initiator of Burma's independence, Seekins gives an overview of 1930s British colonial Burma and the gravitation of Burmese nationalists, the Thakins, towards the Japanese military. The Japanese agents working with the nationalists were a major contributor to the elite identity of the Thakins, and the post war aggressive, militant race based military government. The war occupies a sentimental place in Japanese post-war culture, with five hundred books relating to the Burma War written by war veterans. The most famous of these is *Harp of Burma*, a nostalgic look at the experiences of Japanese soldiers in an older, simpler culture; a reflection of Japan's "sadly departed past," rather than a description of Burmese society during the war. Nevertheless, large numbers of returning war veterans visiting Burma after the war attest to the lingering role of Burma in post war Japanese identity.

After the war, on negotiating peace terms, Burma refused to work within the American imposed framework and made bilateral arrangements with the Japanese government. Japanese war reparations made towards Burma were the "first made by Japan with any Asian country," and here the "irrationality" of Japan's massive aid projects in Burma began. The aid was typically tied to benefit Japanese business by building huge and costly projects which ill-fitted Burma's stage of development. Seekins diminishes the role of shared history and culture between the nations, countering this with the example of Bangladesh, another country in which Japanese businesses benefited more from the building of expensive loan projects than the aid recipient. Loans made were of symbiotic benefit, Ne Win receiving much needed foreign capital in a dilapidated state managed economy leaving him free to allocate remaining government resources to the counter-insurgency. Post Ne Win, the Japanese government changed its aid policy towards Burma in light of international condemnation of the crackdown and Aung San Suu Kyi's criticism of the role of aid in bolstering the SLORC government. However, aid and business deals hardly stopped, with the sale of land belonging to the Burmese embassy in Tokyo in 1989 netting the new junta \$435 million. Japan embarked on its programme of 'quiet dialogue' hoping to entice the junta towards reform while continuing significant aid; this programme has failed entirely.

Seekins refers to a wide range of original sources from Japanese texts to interviews with Japanese businessmen involved with projects in Burma. The book is concise and highly informative, including tables of

economic data and diverse cultural and historical references, all the while being an accessible and interesting read. Its brevity is a weakness, necessitating simplifications where a broader scope would have aided an understanding of the role of Burma in Japan's post-war development. Japanese-Burmese relations were already well underway by 1940, with surveillance operations, covert operatives and aid for subversion at a peak. The British were equally responsible in making the Thakins an elite clique, directing their security apparatus towards Thakin activity in the years preceding war. Great attention is paid to political developments in Burma in 1988, and yet the Ne Win coup d'état of 1958 is skimmed over; if it wasn't as significant to Japanese aid as the events of 1988, why not? Some comparison with Korea would better illustrate Burma's distinctness. Seekins blames the state managed economy for impoverishing post-independence Burma, but as Chalmers Johnson notes¹ Japan itself adopted a centrally managed, state planned economy in the post-war period and massively benefited. Other answers must be sought for Burma's impoverishment than its pursuance of a different route from 'capitalist' Japan. Nevertheless, Seekins highlights some important points for further exploration, closing the book by noting the opaque nature of Japanese bureaucracy and decision making processes, paralleled by the similarly dimly veiled power elite in Rangoon. This mysterious and unaccountable facade frustrates rational analysis of the true nature of the relationship between the two countries.

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¹ Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy* (California, 1982).

Resources for learning literary Mon: A Commentary on Emmanuel Guillon (2003), *Parlons Mon (Homeri Moun Co): Langue et Civilization*, Paris: L'Harmattan.

The vast majority of languages on university campuses around the world are categorized as “less commonly taught languages” (LCTLs). University budgets do not allow for the permanent hiring of a faculty member to teach most languages. Even though it is difficult to find a traditional language course for these languages, they are still essential for some research projects and jobs after graduation, so ways must be found to provide students with adequate training in these languages (See the *Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL) Project* and *Journal of the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages*).

The Mon language of Thailand and Lower Burma is an extreme case of such a less commonly taught language. The reasons why someone might wish to learn the language range from working with an NGO providing help to Mon refugees along the Thai border to linguistic research or studying the history, Buddhist religion, and literary traditions of the Mons. It is the later topic, Mon history and literature, that this mini-review of resources for learning to read literary Mon is primarily concerned with.

Some knowledge of basic spoken Mon will be necessary whatever the student eventually wishes to do with the language. Guillon’s *Parlons Mon (Homeri Moun Co): Langue et Civilization* (2003) is perhaps the only book that aims to provide such basic knowledge. The approach of this wonderful little book is simple and geared towards learning to speak and carry on simple conversations in the Mon language. The book has the same practical dialogues that you normally find in textbooks focused on everyday spoken language. This makes the book rather unique since most books on the Mon language written in western languages are highly technical and written for linguists.

The most useful and valuable part of Emmanuel Guillon’s book for most people, whether they are native French speakers or not, will be the last two sections that provide common everyday expressions and dialogues in Mon. These sections demonstrate clearly how Mon sentences are woven together from Mon words and grammar. Each sentence is presented in four different ways: 1. a French sentence, 2. the Mon translation written in Mon alphabet, 3. the same Mon sentence written in a western IPA-style phonetic script that makes the sentence easy to read and pronounce, 4. the Mon sentence translated (glossed) literally word-for-word into French, resulting in a sentence with French words in Mon word order (an interlinear gloss) that has no real meaning in either language but which serves as a bridge between the two languages. Even if you do not know French, the sentences are simple enough that the words can be looked up quickly with a small dictionary. The content of these two sections runs as follows:

Everyday expressions: 1. Greetings, 2. Understanding and being understood., 3. Times and dates, 4. The seasons of the year and climate, 5. Space and directions, 6. Paying at the market, at the hotel, 7. Eating and drinking, 8. Expressing one’s feelings, 9. Talking about health, 10. The family, society, and the army, and 11. At the monastery.

Eight dialogues: 1. Hygiene, 2. In the village, 3. After a visit to grandmother, 4. At the market, 5. Talking about the weather tomorrow, 6. A trip in the car, 7. A telephone conversation, 8. A collection of manuscripts.

Skipping back to the front of the book, the first part of the book provides basic background information on Mon language, literature, and history. The discussion of Mon literary genres describes various forms of treatises, Pali translations [Burmese: *nissaya*], oral folk literature, and other forms of Mon writing in both verse and prose. Guillon (1999) treats most of these topics in greater detail. One of the very interesting works that Guillon discusses is the *Lokapaññatti* cosmology (Denis, 1975, 1979; Mus, 1939), much less famous than the Thai *Traibh mikath* Buddhist cosmology (Reynolds and Reynolds, 1982) but perhaps no less important in the greater context of Southeast Asian history.

The second part of the book provides the basics of Mon language pronunciation, writing, and grammar. Mon's tone-like registers (tense and lax vowels) are a language feature that Mon shares in common with Khmer and sets it apart other commonly studied Asian languages such as Chinese or Thai. Basic Mon grammar is also explained mostly through lists of words (particles) used to convey grammar and through simple example sentences. Finally, two small Mon-French and French-Mon glossaries are provided in the back of Guillon's book. Hla (1988-89), Sujarilak Wajarat (1978), Jenny (2001), and Broadwell (no date) also provide the basics of the Mon grammar and pronunciation. Sujarilak (1978) provides the basics of constructing Mon noun phrases, verb phrases, clauses, and sentences. Sentences are provided in the same inter-linear fashion as Guillon's book.

Once the basics of the Mon language have been mastered translations of Mon works accompanied by the Mon text can be used as reading practice. Reading these translations in parallel can help the student progress to the point where they can start reading Mon historical and literary works that haven't been translated yet. For reading practice, Dupont (1954) and Guillon (1983) provide French translations with transliterated Mon. The Dupont volume also provides a glossary. These volumes are invaluable resources for learning the style of literary Mon used in historical and Buddhist texts. Shorto (1958) provides an insightful review of the Dupont translation and its limitations. In a similar fashion to Dupont, Halliday (1917, 1923a, 1923b, 1929) provides texts in the Mon alphabet with an English translation. Hla (1992) provides several legal treatises in Mon script with English translation. San Lwin's (no date) recent English language translation of the Burmese version of the Mon Rajahirat epic [Burmese: Razadarit Ayeidawpon] can also be used as a tutor text to read the recently republished Mon *Pak Lat* version of the epic (Maung Toe, 2003; see Halliday and Bauer, 2000, 143-160; and Paphatsaun Thianpanya, 2003; for background on the Pak Lat Mon press).

Several good dictionaries of the Mon language are available. Shorto (1962) covers the spoken language, transliterating Mon words into a form easy for the beginner to pronounce. Halliday's (1922) dictionary uses the Mon alphabet. Tun Way (1997, 2000) provides the most complete dictionaries. Shorto (1971) is a specialized dictionary that covers the older version of Mon found in inscriptions. Bauer (1982), and Jenny (2005) all provide deeper analysis of Mon grammatical structures. Additional books and academic

papers useful for learning Mon are included in the linguistics section of Bauer (1984, 1988-89). The Mon-Khmer Studies Journal has many useful articles and is now online. There are also several useful books in Thai for learning to speak Mon which space does not permit to cover here.

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Mikael Gravers, ed. *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press. 2007. xx + 283 pp. Maps, Illus., Index. ISBN 87-91114-96-9 ²

This volume of papers from the 2002 Burma Studies Conference in Gothenburg helps to fill a twofold gap in the scholarly literature on ethnicity in mainland Southeast Asia, namely a lack of evidence from within Burma and a dearth of historical data on ethnic formation. Following the publication of Edmund Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, a generation of anthropologists extended and refined his ideas about the definition of ethnic categories as contrasting social roles. Most of these conducted field research in Thailand, using synchronic ethnographic methods. One of this generation, F. K. Lehman (F. K. L. Chit Hlaing in this volume), who alone conducted field research in Burma, set spelled out a challenge for historical evidence posed by the relational definition of ethnicity that they helped establish. He wrote, "there should be evidence that...ethnic categories were traditionally defined over a long period of Burmese history by role complimentation and not absolutely."³ The essays in this volume take up the challenge of uncovering such evidence, in varied contexts, with varying results, and in varying degrees of quality. Together, they point to the limitations of the concept 'ethnicity' for explaining the wide range of social identities at work among communities in Burma.

Apart from the curiously placed theoretical chapter (Lehman), each author focuses on a particular ethnic category: Mon (Ashley South), Karen (Mikael Gravers), Karenni (Sandra Dudley), Shan (Takatani Michio), Chin (Lian Sakhong), and Kachin (Mandy Sadan), and another on contemporary Kachin ethnopolitical geography (Karin Dean). This arrangement is useful for researchers interested in a particular ethnic group. Each chapter stands on its own merits, some more firmly than others. Some of the arguments presented here have already been overtaken by current events or superseded by more recent publications. However, the volume as a whole provides a very useful cross-section of research on ethnicity in Burma leading up to a critical juncture in its history. The contributors use a wide variety of anthropological, historical, linguistic, and political approaches, each seeking to contextualize ethnic identification across borders (Dudley, Dean), in colonial pasts (Gravers, Sadan), or with relation to other units of identity, such as religious or civil society groups, local or linguistic communities (Takatani, Siakhong, South).

Mandy Sadan contributes a rich extract from her groundbreaking doctoral research on the history of Kachin ethnic expression. Sadan unpacks the development of the category 'Kachin' through the colonial era and beyond, questioning the often-repeated mantra that ethnic categories are merely products of colonial expediency. Readers interested in pithy political-economy analysis may be put off at first glance by her methodology, which makes heavy use of ritual and oral tradition. This would be a mistake. The careful reader

² Editorial note: the present review will also appear in the forthcoming issue of *South East Asia Research*.

³ Lehman, "Ethnic Categories in Burma and the Theory of Social Systems," in Peter Kunstadter, ed. *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations* vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967): 108.

will be rewarded by an erudite and historically grounded argument that counterbalances the assertion (echoed uncritically elsewhere in this volume) that ethno-political difference is a colonial imposition. In excavating the rhetorical and ritual expression of Kachin-ness, Sadan shows that the edifice of ethnicity was constructed neither according to a primordial blueprint nor on completely new foundations. This is by far the most complete and nuanced analysis in the volume, and sets a standard by which the others largely fail.

Sandra Dudley presents a study of a particular model of Karenni ethnicity—that of the KNPP—and its institutional setting within Karenni refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border. While much has been written about this border and its refugee camps, the Karenni have largely been overshadowed by their more numerous Karen cousins to the south. Dudley's work not only redresses this imbalance, it presents a framework for understanding the dynamics of non-Karenni camps as well. Dudley offers a thoughtful first-hand analysis of the interplay between the KNPP elite, refugee youth, and foreign aid workers in rehearsing and promoting an orthodox Karenni identity. There is much food for thought here. However, following Sadan's contribution this analysis seems limited by comparison. It inevitably leaves questions unanswered that some readers will want to seek elsewhere. Dudley warns that ethnogenesis, history, religion, and 'pre- or post-exile imaginations of Karenni-ness' are not considered in her chapter (p.78), and she helpfully provides references to other works on these topics. Still, she is too dismissive here of historical expressions of Karenni identity, and appears guilty of lumping them into the straw man of a discredited primordial “‘truth’... in what ‘Karenni’ actually means.” (p. 82). The political border between Burma and Thailand cannot separate the refugees from the wider historical and geospatial context of ethnic identification or the human networks that produced it. References to tensions with “ethnic leaders inside Burma” (p. 83) and the comparative cosmopolitanism of refugee life (p. 102–03) hint at the interplay of the refugee experience with different forms of Karenni ethnic mobilization inside Burma. How, if at all, have people reconciled or responded to these differences? Is their presence in the refugee camp itself a response? These questions must be pursued elsewhere. All the same, this chapter helps clarify the intra-camp politics of ethnicity at a time when large-scale refugee resettlement is increasing interest in the border camps.

Karin Dean attempts to define the boundaries of Kachin 'social space' as conceived and enacted by the collection of Kachin/ Jinghpaw/ Wunpawng groups across the political border between Burma and China. While the frame of this story is familiar—the mismatch between colonial/ national borders and geo-social “facts on the ground”—a number of novel and illuminating observations emerge. Dean attempts to “map” more abstract cognitive boundaries of Kachin-identified groups. She presents evidence of self-identification through expressions of “national character” and the like. Of particular interest is Dean's comparison of Kachin identification within and between the defined “minority” regions of Burma and China. She highlights the prevalence of cross-border marriage to show how geographies of kinship cut across national political units and suggest a wider ethnic consciousness.

F. K. Lehman's (here F.K.L. Chit Hlaing) “Remarks upon Ethnicity Theory” provide a useful précis of the author's previous work on this subject, and add much in the way of theoretical context for the other

essays. Lehman draws in ample evidence from more recent studies that, together with his wide-ranging knowledge of the ethnographic landscape of the region, allow these remarks to function as a useful bibliographical essay. Readers unfamiliar with Prof. Lehman's inimitable style may be puzzled by his polyvalent nomenclature (not least in reference to himself) and other quirks of expression. The introduction of "SI" as an abbreviation for "social identity," for example, seems unnecessary to shorten only four subsequent uses of the phrase, all within the final paragraph. Even so, it is this final proposal that proves most important—that ethnicity be construed as one—if perhaps a "maximal" one—of a number of overlapping fields of social identity.

Ashley South briefly traces the history of Mon-Burmese political relations to 2002, culminating in an analysis of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) as a case study for the development role of ethnic cease-fire groups. South examines the role of these groups not only in national politics and international engagement, but also their leadership in the post-ceasefire environment of local politics and economic development—a realm that is poorly understood by most foreign observers. His analysis is, as he points out, necessarily dated. The United Nationalities Alliance, for example, appears to have been bypassed by recent events. However, South's emphasis on civil society groups and the question of armed ethnic parties' future in Burmese politics is more pertinent than ever. The events of the past year—especially the so-called "saffron revolution" and the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis—have drawn attention to the resurgent role of religious and community organizations, particularly the Buddhist *sangha*. This seems to support South's assertion that civil society networks in Burma have been slowly rebuilding. When this research was first presented, civil society groups were only beginning to gain the attention of political analysts, but now it is a common topic of study. The analysis here is largely superceded by South's recent book, *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict* (Routledge, 2008).

Takatani Michio outlines the ongoing redefinition of "Shan" in a regional process of cultural standardisation mirroring the national programme of "Burmanization." Attention is given to expressions of both geographic and ethnic classification with Shan and Burmese frames of reference. Takatani uses both colonial records and postcolonial sources, but does not seem to propose any significant shift in identification between the two—leaving the question of colonial impact unaddressed. He highlights the importance of Buddhist literary heritage in Shan script as an important element of cultural identity and preservation. This stands in stark contrast to the other essays in the book, which largely overlook the primacy of language—whether spoken or written—as an attribute of ethnic identity. Perhaps the warnings of Lehman (ch.4 note 5) against equating language and ethnicity have obscured the way in which language is used to mark differences in social identity. Part of this may be an oral bias of most linguistic and ethnographic research, although differences in speech have long been recognized as markers of class or regional identity. Script and canon here serve to shore up Shan identity around the history transmitted in Shan language and literature.

The theme of religion is taken up in the final two pieces, by Lian Siakhong (Chin) and Gravers (Karen). Lian Siakhong provides a rare glimpse into the history and mythology of Chin ethnic formation.

After fragmenting into locally defined groups in prehistory, he claims, Christianity provided a vehicle for re-integration. He shows how Baptist association meetings helped create an imagined community—a story that echoes a common analysis of Karen ethnic integration. Siakhong then takes a unique turn in pointing out the continuity between Christianity and traditional Chin religion. Christians sought and found common ground with Chin stories and rituals concerning the afterlife, propitiation and the sacrificial feast. This perceived continuity is reflected in the stories of Chin, who are some ninety percent Christians, and in the syncretic observance of feasts of the Christian calendar in a traditional vein. The only indigenous contributor, Siakhong might be criticized as being inordinately biased or even naive in embracing the Christianization of Chin culture so uncritically. However, this is a detailed and valuable account of the process of religious transformation, and introduces a much-needed indigenous view of ethnicity in history.

Gravers' recent work has increasingly relied on historical data, and his chapter on Karen religious communalism continues this trend. His chapter attempts to answer a question that was new and vexing during the 1990s, around the time of publication of his last book, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma*. The question arose from the unexpected breakaway of a Buddhist faction, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) from the Karen National Union, exposing religious fault lines in the Karen Nationalist movement. This division had been obscured by nearly a century of scholarship examining Karen developments through the lens of ethnography (primarily in Thailand) and nationalism (primarily in Burma)—constructs useful for academic analysis, but often poorly matched to facts on the ground. Gravers delves into the colonial period through the *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, and does as convincing a job as any publication to date of elaborating the standard narrative of Christian-dominated Karen ethno-nationalism into the 20th century. On twentieth century developments, interview data from Saw Ba Thin is particularly illuminating. Although this narrative follows well-established contours, he provides an impressive level of detail on the early Karen national organizations, particularly the 1881 Karen National Association—a group that has often been cited but seldom examined. However, much of the information he cites is not properly contextualized. While he is concerned with religious variation among the Karen groups, he pays little attention to regional or dialect differences that bear on this process. This reflects a limitation of the *Missionary Magazine*, which is internal to the narrative and often careless about publishing all of the relevant information. To provide a convincing picture of religion and Karen identity, the views of Karen Buddhists, as well as Catholics and other Christian groups need to be considered. Sources on these groups exist, though generally not in English.

This brings up a serious limitation reflected throughout the book—the authors make use of very few sources written in the languages of Burma. Even though these authors as a group have sharpened our focus on developments within each ethnic category, the perspective remains firmly an external one. If anything, the finely grained picture of social identity provided in these studies questions the value of ethnicity as a basis of comparison, particularly as it relates to its political expression. The variously expressed social identities examined here—including religion, location, dialect, or political affiliation—show a dynamic and often

competitive environment of social differentiation. Differences that might be called ethnic are not necessarily the most meaningful. This is true even in the realm of contemporary politics, where Chinese leaders conduct business under an organization with the ethnic label 'Wa', and cease-fires are brokered with individual Karen commanders who have no obvious affinity with the government. Ethnicity, if it exists, is not practiced or produced systematically.

A handful of pedestrian flaws affect the way the book is read. Black and white photographs add interest to the text throughout, but one or two seem out of place. For example, a photograph of the Mae La refugee camp appears in Sandra Dudley's chapter about Karenni camps farther north along the Thai border. A few typographical errors are worth noting. Particularly egregious is the map on p.xx that labels Rohingya as "Rohinoya," p. 28, 4th line from the bottom of the page, "analyse" should read "analyses," or perhaps "analyzes," given "burmanization" a few lines later, and "scrutinize," on the previous page. Page 75 wants a heading. Other typographic errors can be found throughout. Notes are placed at the end of each chapter, as is common in edited books. This is inconvenient. The reader must rifle through the pages to find the notes section. The inconvenience is compounded by the use of author/ date citations within the footnotes themselves. Such an arrangement defies the logic of scholarly apparatus, and combines the worst elements of both systems. The hapless reader must search in at least two different places for the first mention of a title. Footnotes with full references would be much easier to use.

In sum, this work provides a set of useful guideposts for future research into a number of topics relating to ethnicity in Burma. Most of these guideposts point away from isolating ethnicity as an objectively identifiable phenomenon. Histories of ethnicity are inextricable from the histories of people who define themselves in a number of different ways. Future studies should continue to question the narrative of colonial/ national ethnicism and look deeper into the local contexts in which social differences have been asserted.

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